BLOOMSBURY GOOD READING GUIDES

100 MUST-READ

FANTASY NOVELS

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ABOUTTHISBOOK

To understand the references in the one hundred individual book entries to movements and moments in the history of Fantasy, it is advisable to tackle the **Introduction** first (or consult the **Glossary** for definitions of Fantasy and literary terminology). The entries then follow A to Z by author, describing the plot of each title while aiming to avoid too many 'spoilers', offering some value judgements and describing the author's place in Fantasy and/or their other works. The use of the symbol ›› before an author's name in the text (e.g. ›› **Michael Moorcock**) indicates that we have selected at least one of their books as one of the main A–Z entries in the text. We have also noted significant film versions (with dates of release) where applicable, followed by 'Read on' lists comprising books by the same author, books by stylistically similar writers or books on a theme relevant to the main entry. 'Read on a Theme' entries will help those who wish to explore a particular area of Fantasy in more depth and a listing of World Fantasy Award winning novels is included for reference.

This book is not a 'Best of' as we decided it would be impossible to produce a definitive list of the greatest Fantasy novels while limiting ourselves to only one hundred titles without making unacceptably subjective choices. Nor is it a 'Top 100', as popularity polls only tell us what we already know, and as Fantasy is about the unbridled

imagination, too much reliance on the familiar should be anathema to Fantasy readers. Instead, we decided that our title should steer us and we have chosen one hundred books we feel one could read (or read about) to gain an introductory overview of Fantasy, while leaving many essential works to be discovered by the reader in the extra features. To produce a book intended to be a starting point for exploring the genre, we felt that we needed to cover the major themes of Fantasy – from the perennial ideas the reader would expect from their experience of Fantasy in the mass media to the more unusual concepts that rarely make it onto TV or cinema screens. This is why in a number of instances some authors are not represented by what some people may argue are technically their best or most famous books. The necessity of this approach did cause us some pain, especially in the cases of writers who are prolific, brilliant and important to the history of Fantasy but in the end, to ensure we covered the maximum number of authors, we decided that only a handful of writers required more than one entry and all of these are massively prolific, critically acclaimed and phenomenal bestsellers. In short, we have focused on titles that we think are both representative of their themes and singularly important to the development of Fantasy as a genre or a publishing category. Significantly, we have broken with our usual rule of only covering adult novels in this *Must-Read* as it is almost impossible to understand or fully appreciate the breadth of Fantasy literature without considering the many important children's books which have contributed enormously to the development of the genre, a claim that would be difficult to justify with genres such as SF or crime fiction

The tendency since the late 1970s for Fantasy authors to produce multi-volume series also compounded our problems, so our entries

concentrate on first volumes in series, so when we recommend an initial title in a series, we are implying that you may wish to read the sequels we have listed. Where possible, we have listed the titles of **omnibus editions** that collect whole series of books into a single volume, as these collected versions are sometimes attractively priced and easier to locate. Series titles are in bold italics (e.g. ***The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant***), titles of novels and short story collections are in italics, while short stories and novellas are reproduced in quotes (e.g. 'Ill Met in Lankhmar'). Where we use the term **internal chronology**, we mean the order in which the events in a series take place – which can be different from the order in which a series of novels are issued (the ***Narnia*** books of ›› C.S. Lewis include one famous example of this, *The Magician's Nephew*, whose events precede *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first book of the series to be published).

Younger readers may not be aware that many classic Fantasy 'novels' were originally published as short story serials in magazines (few Fantasy novels were published in book form and labelled as such until the late 1970s), so we indicate this by the use of the word **collected** alongside a date, indicating when the tales were first presented in book form. In the spirit of unfettered imagination that Fantasy relies upon, we have ignored the constraints of our title in a few instances to include a handful of vitally important short story collections by authors highly significant in the history of imaginative literature, whose most important Fantastic work is in shorter forms.

As Fantasy publishing is currently experiencing its second boom in a period of less than forty years, we have excluded a number of currently popular but nonetheless derivative works and writers at the expense of books and authors without whom there would have been no mass

market for Fantasy in the first place. Context is everything: unless the reader has a working knowledge of these writers, they will be unable to judge the real worth of contemporary writers.

As regards availability, we have tried to select a majority of books that are reprinted regularly. A trip to your local bookshop armed with your chosen titles and authors should be enough for a bookseller to check availability for you. However, the commercial reality of publishing is that many classics now remain out of print for years on end, only reaching readers via the goodwill of committed editors at major houses and dedicated fanatics at small presses. The good news is that due to print-on-demand technology and the generally easy availability of out of print titles and imports via the internet, hours of scouring second hand bookshops for that elusive masterpiece should only be an enjoyably serendipitous last resort. We were nevertheless delighted to find that a large number of classic Fantasy titles were in print either in the USA or UK at the time this book went to press.

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INTRODUCTION

What exactly is Fantasy? We may already think we know what Fantasy is and what its key works are, but when we try and pin it down, Fantasy becomes slippery and difficult to quantify. Upon visiting bookshops or libraries, we usually discover that the books we immediately think of as typical Fantasies are shelved with the Science Fiction and rarely – if ever – separated from these tales of spaceships, aliens, advanced computer technology and future societies. Sometimes, these bookcases bear the label 'Science Fiction', without any mention of Fantasy, even though they contain the works of Tolkien, Peake and Pratchett alongside the novels of Asimov, Dick and Wells. When we try to separate these two genres, lumped together as they are for historical and practical reasons (more on this later), even more awkward questions arise, most prominent being the inevitable 'What is the difference between Fantasy and Science Fiction?', a query that came up at every single appearance I made at libraries, bookshops and lecture halls while promoting *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*.

The persistence of this question has convinced me that deciding what constitutes the dividing line between SF and Fantasy is an important literary issue for many of us. Consequently, in this introduction I'm going to try to define Fantasy, differentiate it from SF (as we'll refer to Science Fiction), then outline the history of Fantasy

publishing, thus creating a context for the books we've selected as must-reads. Here's my suggested definition of Fantasy:

> *Fantasy is the literature of imaginary and inexplicable places, times, events and beings. Fantasy stories take place either in our world or others, in our time or other times, their authors describing imaginary things that they do not attempt to explain rationally or scientifically, sometimes evoking magic and the supernatural to provide an excuse for the presence of these imaginary elements.*

Implicit in this definition of Fantasy as the literature of the inexplicable are two important points that help differentiate Fantasy from SF:

1. Authors are under no pressure to explain the imaginary elements of their stories rationally when writing Fantasy, but can merely present them at face value.
2. Similarly, readers undergo no pressure to seek rational explanations for the imaginary elements of Fantasy stories, but can simply accept them at face value too.

In short, we can all relax, enjoy and *excuse* the imaginary elements of Fantasy, rather than worry about having to *explain* them. As readers mature, they sometimes become dissatisfied with this, perhaps seeing an author's failure to rationalise the tallest elements of their tales as childish rather than liberating (after all, we've discovered that the real world is complex and demands explanations). Some readers will then reject Fantasy in favour of the rationality of SF and Realism, seeing Fantasy as making poor (or no) excuses in its attempt to convince us of its veracity. Conversely, some readers grow weary of rationality, and merely wish to escape, accept and enjoy the bliss of a good story for its

own sake – it's only fiction, after all! Consequently, Fantasy can re-attract our attention in adulthood, as we grow psychologically dissatisfied with our mundane world of regimented order and predictable tedium. So we return to our pleasure in tales that need no explanation on the part of the author or ourselves. We are back in the land of Fantasy, a place where the inexplicable is King.

FANTASTIC BUT NOT FANTASY? THE PROBLEM OF SCIENCE FICTION

Journalists and presenters working in the mass media have a habit of using the term 'Fantasy' in a very broad sense. This usage actually indicates a line being drawn between Realism and what used to be known as 'Romance', which was a catch-all literary term for any work of fiction or drama that was not realistic. This usage results in misleading and tautological phrases like 'Sci-Fi Fantasy', a misnomer if ever there was one. Most literary critics agree that what the media pundits mean by 'Fantasy' is what they (the critics) call 'The Fantastic', a catch-all term for Fantasy, Science Fiction and any other forms of non-realistic fiction you might care to recognise, such as Magical Realism. Naturally, we don't use the term 'Romance' these days, as the word has become identified with popular love stories, which is unfortunate, as 'The Fantastic' and 'Fantasy' initially appear interchangeable.

What many readers think of when they hear the word 'Fantasy' tends to be the most popular sub-category of the genre, which critics call Genre Fantasy, but which ›› Fritz Leiber dubbed 'Sword & Sorcery' (or S&S as we'll refer to it for short). This more specific usage of the word 'Fantasy' refers to the best-known work of authors like ›› Robert E. Howard and ›› Michael Moorcock, rather than that of ›› Jorge Luis

Borges or ›› Angela Carter. Meanwhile, the works of ›› J.R.R. Tolkien and his acolytes, because of their size and scope, have become the template for what is sometimes called 'High Fantasy'. In terms of content (typically swords, wizards, quests, dragons, little people and sorcerers), there is scant difference between Sword & Sorcery and High Fantasy – the latter merely puts a greater emphasis on events changing the world of the story irrevocably. Consequently, we will refer to both these variants of popular fantasy as 'Genre Fantasy' throughout this book. The glossary at the end of the book will help you keep in mind the specific meanings of each term we use.

While it is often argued that SF is a sub-category of the Fantastic, SF is nevertheless quite distinct from Genre Fantasy. In SF, what first *appears* to be the inexplicable can arise, but it is often explained by the author – through rationalisations placed noticeably and deliberately in the text (these passages are often described as 'infodump') – or otherwise deduced by the reader, who picks up the subtler clues placed by more crafty authors. The nature of these authorial 'explanations' can be implicitly or explicitly scientific in character, and they are therefore intended to indicate the explicable rather than the inexplicable. Science is, after all, about explaining phenomena rationally and completely, without recourse to the vagueness of supernatural agencies. Therefore, you could say that there are simply firm rules imposed upon the imagination by authors when they write SF, rules that are demanded by the SF readership, rules which limit what can and can't be done in SF stories. Specifically, the writer has to make a convincing case for reasonably realistic possible future technologies to explain the presence of elements like androids, time travellers and extra-terrestrials in his tales. Conversely, in Genre Fantasy proper (such as S&S), magic

can be used to excuse the existence of sentient swords, goblins and sorcerers, rather than the author having to explain them scientifically.

But isn't some of the 'science' used by SF writers imaginary and unlikely to ever be created? As we're discussing fiction, not real life, we can safely use the approach of divining an author's intention to determine if a story is Fantasy or SF by looking at what evidence they provide for us in each case, examining the *content* of their stories and evaluating if they are using 'science' or magic. The fact is that most authors intentionally signal that they are referring to scientifically explicable marvels rather than definitively inexplicable ones quite unambiguously in their stories. Additionally, the history of science has shown us that technological developments believed to be impossible in the relatively recent past have become part of our everyday lives and that this continues to be the case as our scientific knowledge evolves, so when reading SF, we assume that the 'imaginary science' of some SF could one day cease to be imaginary and become theoretically possible.

THE DEVIL IN THE DETAIL: SCIENCE FANTASY AND HORROR

Of course, some authors don't like to put limitations on their imagination by obeying anyone's ideas about genre boundaries, producing stories which appear to contain elements of both SF and Fantasy. Other writers (notably Horror scribe Ramsey Campbell) believe that imposing genre boundaries can give a writer's vision discipline and edifying rigour, making their narratives more plausible and authentic to readers. Both viewpoints are valid. The fact is that in the majority of apparently genre-straddling books, there is often one 'novelty' that breaks the camel's back in providing evidence for a work's genre status – and it is

usually a magical/supernatural one. As soon as the supernatural is revealed to be *real* in the world of the story and not scientifically explicable, the tale in question is definitely not SF, but Fantasy, no matter how many of the common 'novelties' of SF (such as robots or spaceships) appear in the text.

One area where making value judgements of these kinds can be almost impossible is in the form commonly known as Science Fantasy, which is probably more responsible than any other type of fiction for confusing readers who are trying to differentiate between Fantasy and SF. Science Fantasy is a term that was popular in the 1970s, used to describe stories set in the future or on other planets where both science and magic (and the important S&S content symbolism of swordplay) *appear* to be present. Many experts cite ›› Edgar Rice Burroughs' ***A Princess of Mars*** as the key forerunner of Science Fantasy. The novel is probably SF, but its narrative and prose have the 'magical' colour and tone found in so much S&S. However, it has no definitive supernatural elements as such, perhaps with the exception of the means by which the hero is transported to Mars, but Burroughs' description of this transition is so lacking in explanatory detail that it could be interpreted one way or the other. SF stories like this, set in other worlds, featuring swashbuckling adventure (but no actual magic) are often called 'Planetary Romances' (key authors of early Planetary Romances were Leigh Brackett, ›› C.L. Moore and ›› Jack Vance). But perhaps the most important predecessor of true Science Fantasy were the ***Zothique*** stories of ›› Clark Ashton Smith. These multi-hued, gothic narratives are set in a far future where magic and science appear to be co-existent. Vance used this idea in his ***Dying Earth*** stories, which – more than any of their forebears – finally codified true Science Fantasy, as it is impossible to tell if the

'magic' in these stories is actually advanced technology or just good old-fashioned enchantment. Other authors following Smith's colourful lead, blending machinery and spells in distant futures depicting somnolent Earths expiring of old age include ›› Michael Moorcock (*Hawkmoon*, *Dancers At The End of Time*), ›› Gene Wolfe (*The Book of the New Sun*) and ›› M. John Harrison (*Viriconium*). All these sagas feature the symbols of S&S – blade-wielding, mystic brotherhoods and so on – but all include what appears to be high technology too.

SF writer Arthur C. Clarke once famously stated that the technology of a truly advanced race would be indistinguishable from magic to a less-developed society, so perhaps if we ever (1) prove the existence of the supernatural and magic, then (2) explain it scientifically, perhaps all Fantasy stories relying on magic could be re-categorised as SF. Because of the ambiguity around the 'is it science or is it magic?' question in most Science Fantasy novels, we have decided to include several of them in this book, as their ambiguous nature discouraged us from including them in *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*. What we have excluded are pure, unambiguously SF Planetary Romances like Anne McCaffrey's ***Pern*** sequence, for example, which appear to be Science Fantasy at first glance. Despite the fact that these books are set in an archaic-seeming society that initially appears to be loaded with Fantasy symbolism, the novels are set on another planet in the future and feature genetically engineered dragons instead of mythological ones. McCaffrey has confirmed that the ***Pern*** novels are SF, a fact that becomes increasingly obvious as the story develops.

As for Horror, it is not truly a genre but an emotional and philosophical approach to writing fiction, as its consistent focus is on our universal fear of death and our concerns about the frailty of our bodies

and minds. Of course, the variable content of horror stories actually places individual books into different genres – while Richard Matheson's scientifically explained vampires in *I Am Legend* make the book an SF classic, the religious elements of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* confirm that his classic tale of the vampire Count is Supernatural Horror. Because of the emphasis on superstition and religion in Supernatural Horror, we can place this sub-genre within the magical realm of Fantasy (in fact, from the mid-1980s on, it became fashionable to call Supernatural Horror 'Dark Fantasy' instead). Finally, realistic serial killer tales with no magical or SF content (but with plenty of psychological mayhem and gory violence), such as Robert Bloch's *Psycho*, could be claimed as a subset of Crime fiction, placing them outside the environs of Fantasy altogether, while still focusing enough on the fragility of the flesh to be considered worthy of the Horror tag.

For the purposes of this book, we have largely excluded Supernatural Horror/Dark Fantasy, as it will be covered in a future *Good Reading Guide*. Instead, we have tried to concentrate on works we feel certain are unambiguously Fantasy. But as we've implied, the very nature of Fantasy is indistinct, so we have at times lapsed over the border into the broader realms of The Fantastic where an author's influence has undoubtedly contributed to the development of Fantasy in significant ways – for example, there is much evidence to suggest that our ›› M. John Harrison selection is SF. Similarly, it seemed perverse to exclude the multifaceted work of ›› H.P. Lovecraft (some of it is arguably SF, much of it is Supernatural Horror, some of it is undeniably Fantasy – but it all falls within the realm of The Fantastic), as his name recurs at numerous junctures in this book in relation to other seminal Fantasy writers. As Lovecraft's primary focus was the eternally inexplicable, he

perhaps typifies the ambiguous, near-indefinable nature of The Fantastic more significantly than almost any other author.

Ultimately, considerable bookselling experience and an unfeasible amount of reading is required to authoritatively separate Fantasy and SF on bookshop shelves (which is why you rarely see such separation in practice, as today no single reader would have time to read all the genre fiction published). Other important reasons why the two genres usually share the same section in bookshops is an historical one, revolving around how commercial publishing developed, the difficulty in placing the work of square-peg authors like Lovecraft and the fact that there are numerous authors who have written both pure SF and pure Fantasy.

ANOTHER FINE MYTH: THE ORIGINS OF GENRE FANTASY

The birth of Fantasy lies in the origins of story-telling itself. From the dawning of our species, we have told tales, beginning with recounting the day's hunting when we first stopped being like other primates and started being human. We imagined gods (or heard their commands to us) and related chronicles of holy individuals and places. We migrated across the globe, telling our stories, discovering new ones from the tongues of others and composed our own narratives from our own experiences. Before writing, stories were passed down from generation to generation as oral tradition, gaining and losing in the retelling until we learned to set them down on stone, wax, skins and paper. Some of the stories we told or heard were true and some were lies, embroidered facts or acceptable exaggerations.

The religious, mythical and legendary writings that have had the most influence upon what we recognise today as Fantasy depend to

some extent upon what part of the world you live in. As Western culture is the most dominant in the mass media, the Fantasy derived from the mythology of Europe is almost certainly the most pervasive. Although Classical Literature dominated the history of education in Europe until very recently, modern Fantasy stories based upon the exploits of the Greek gods and heroes (and their Roman equivalents) are comparatively uncommon. This is probably because the Middle Eastern religions of The Book came to dominate Western civilisation once the pagan empire of Rome gave way to a Christianised one and Muslims and Jews relocated to North-Western Europe. But the movement of these faiths has not resulted in directly inspiring much Fantasy fiction in recent centuries (except for the Christian implications and symbolism of Arthurian legends, a major theme in Fantasy for centuries), as these monotheistic religions by definition reject the idea of any gods other than their own. Instead, it is the mythology of pagan North Europe that still dominates much of our Fantasy literature, perhaps because those of us who are of Eurocentric ancestry (the majority of the readership for Genre Fantasy) find something psychologically satisfying in the idea of the mystical calling of our forbears and ancestral homelands. An examination of the stentorian symbolism and doom-laden worldview of Euro-pagan mythology is outside the scope of this book, but there is no doubt that definitive texts such as Iceland's *The Elder Edda*, Finland's *The Kalevala*, England's *Beowulf* or Wales' *The Mabinogion* and the Teutonic operas of Wagner have had more influence over Western Fantasy writing than eastern epics such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Tales of a Thousand and One Nights* or any other monuments of world folklore you care to mention. Arthurian legends appeared in the Dark Ages and proliferated across Western Europe until the Medieval period

in the form of Chivalric Romances – tales of old when knights were bold. These remained even more constant in their popularity, laying the foundations for the modern novel, providing noble respite from the blood and thunder of Norse sagas. The influence of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, the works of Chrétien de Troyes, verses like *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the crusader-age legend of Roman soldier St. George slaying a dragon somewhere in the Middle East, when combined with the mythology of Norse Midgard (Middle Earth) are the flesh and blood of Genre Fantasy, be it High Fantasy or S&S.

An extremely significant early modern novel, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1604) is also central to understanding the history of Fantasy, as it is about a reader obsessed with Chivalric Romances who cannot distinguish reality from Fantasy, pretending to be a knight. At once an argument for Realism, a parody of Fantasy, a fabulation that self-consciously comments upon other texts the reader knows and an extension of the Picaresque tradition (Hispanic tales of low-born rogues that arguably provided the models for some S&S anti-heroes), Don Quixote is a milestone that marks the moment in literary history when we truly began to realise that Fantasy was just that, allowing us to develop the new school of Realistic fiction.

By the late eighteenth century, the novel was established, science was becoming increasingly accepted after centuries of religious dominance and the revolution in ideas known as the Enlightenment ensured that rationalism was the 'in' thing all over Europe and North America. But the reaction to the Enlightenment in the arts was Romanticism, which in its obsession with the sublime, fostered a great flowering of European imaginative writing, from spooky Gothic novels, outright horror, fantastic tales of magic and decadence such as William

Beckford's *Vathek*, Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* and important early SF such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The Romantic tradition continued even as the twentieth century loomed, the Symbolists of the French avant-garde drawing heavily on Fantasy imagery in their stories, novels and poetry, ensuring that The Fantastic (including SF) would become and remain an important facet of modern art right up to the present day. Twentieth century art movements such as Dada, Surrealism and Post-Modernism all draw on Fantasy, ensuring its continual reinjection into the mainstream literature of the contemporary world.

WHEN ARE WE NOW?: FANTASY PUBLISHING SINCE BURROUGHS

Today, many readers assume that the originator of Genre Fantasy was J.R.R. Tolkien. This is an incorrect view, but an understandable one, as there is an obvious literary lineage that links Tolkien's academic studies in Old English with the Arthurian and Chivalric Romances of the late Medieval age, the revival of interest in all things Knightly that came with the success of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) and the Pre-Raphaelite obsessions of artists like Burne-Jones and Renaissance man antiquaries like ›› William Morris with all things Avalonian and Norse. Both ›› Lord Dunsany and ›› E.R. Eddison, whose major works precede Tolkien, tend to be forgotten, since their works have enjoyed fewer popular revivals. But tracing this British genealogy ignores the seminal Heroic Fantasy works published in the pulp magazines by Americans, who preceded Tolkien in creating S&S, the purest distillation of Genre Fantasy. If there is one figure around which the popular vision of The Fantastic seems to coalesce, it is probably ›› Edgar Rice Burroughs, who had massive commercial success in 1912 with his three masterpieces of pulp fiction,

A Princess of Mars, *Tarzan of the Apes* and *The Land That Time Forgot*.

These books created the templates for magazine-based commercial SF and Fantasy. Burroughs' style was brief but effective in its poetry, swift and pulse-pounding in its action and crude yet vigorous in its storytelling. Burroughs' heroes were square-jawed but fascinating and charismatic: Tarzan is also John Clayton, Lord Greystoke – a Nobleman, raised by Apes as a Noble Savage. Tarzan's dual identity and origin, partially drawn from Kipling's Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* (1894), point towards the Janus-faced 1930s comic characters like Batman and Superman, who have secret identities as millionaire Bruce Wayne and reporter Clark Kent respectively (superhero comics are, of course, another major form of Fantasy writing still popular today). Meanwhile, John Carter is both a Western archetype (he is an officer in the American Civil War) and an early SF serial hero, returning to Mars to battle alien beings numerous times in the many sequels to *A Princess of Mars*. Not only predating pulp SF icons Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers, John Carter also uses a sword. Combine the tone and attack of Burroughs with the flowery Nordic-Arthurian tales of William Morris and you have S&S. Although Burroughs' works may not be pure Fantasy, he does seems to have introduced some new, vital flash to popular fiction, albeit displaying the influence of Victorian adventure favourite ›› H. Rider Haggard. Less influential as a writer from this period, but also worth mentioning as a Fantasy pioneer was James Branch Cabell, whose twenty-book ***Poictesme*** series predated the otherwise recent vogue for multi-volume sagas.

If Burroughs turned on the tap, then ›› Robert E. Howard was the true fountainhead of Genre Fantasy. His *Kull* stories started appearing in 1929 in definitive pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, followed by the exploits

of Conan the Barbarian, his most famous creation. Howard's influence is much more prevalent in other early works of Genre Fantasy than that of Tolkien, largely because *The Hobbit* (1937), for all its debt to *Beowulf* in the chapters featuring Smaug the Dragon, is a children's book devoid of true blood and thunder. Readers had to wait until 1953 for *The Fellowship of the Ring* to enjoy Tolkien's take on S&S, producing the cardinal work of High Fantasy, by which time authors such as ›› C.L. Moore and ›› Poul Anderson had produced pure S&S narratives. But Howard's Conan stands before all of these – his spirit infects Anderson's Skafloc, Moorcock's Elric and numerous other S&S doyens who precede Tolkien's Strider. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, American authors continued to be fundamentally responsible for curating and developing Genre Fantasy via S&S, for which there was no popular tradition in the UK, many of these writers also producing SF stories that were published in the same pulp magazines as their Fantasies.

By the 1960s, Tolkien's trilogy finally found a mass audience on campuses in Britain and America and at last became a bestseller. Similarly popular at the same time were the equally massive SF novels *Dune* (Frank Herbert) and *Stranger in a Strange Land* (Robert A. Heinlein). The dynastic, mystical and ecological obsessions of the former and the half-baked libertarian cod-philosophy of the latter suited the pantheistic worldview of hippy students, while Tolkien's blend of genteel pastoral and unambiguous moral relativism possessed plenty of whimsy and just enough shadows to make *The Lord of the Rings* the essential third volume in the flower child's library. Rock musicians in particular became fascinated by Tolkien, from Glam pioneers like Marc Bolan to Progressive doyens such as Argent (to name but two of many), ensuring that J.R.R.T. enjoyed even greater sales growth.

The belated effect of the massive commercial success of *Dune*, *Stranger in a Strange Land* and *The Lord of the Rings* was an (often mistaken) view that big books were the best – or that they were at least what readers wanted. The true birth of this trend was delayed by some years until the end of the sixties, as few genre magazine editors and writers worked for the big US book publishing houses. The magazines had suffered a massive slump at the start of the decade as paperback sales finally outstripped periodical circulations, the magazines never fully recovering. Genre paperbacks of the sixties were often compiled by former magazine editors working for book publishers, who mined the rich seams of periodical back issues published since the mid 1920s to find material to be linked and published as novels in book form (even *Dune* was a magazine serial). The Genre Fantasy being published in paperback at this time still generally comprised shorter works by Vance, Andre Norton, Leiber, Moorcock and ›› Le Guin. But, by the mid 1970s, editors were asked to begin commissioning larger novels that publishing directors hoped would equal the success of *Dune* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

The floodgates of Genre Fantasy as we know it today finally opened after Del Rey books published Terry Brooks' *The Sword of Shannara* (1977). The massive success of this novel revealed a large, previously latent market for Tolkienesque fiction. Over the years that followed, SF editors found that there was an increasingly commercial imperative to publish more generic Fantasy and less SF. Suddenly, immense trilogies were everywhere. Some of these books made for excellent entertainment (such as the works of ›› Stephen Donaldson), but many more were derivative and – ironically for Fantasies – devoid of any real imagination. Nevertheless, Fantasy was now unstoppable. At the

beginning of the 1970s, it would have been impossible to fill a bookcase in a shop with a display of Genre Fantasy novels as there simply weren't enough of them being published, so they were shelved in with the SF, since they were sometimes by the same authors. By the end of the 1980s, publishing budgets previously spent by editors on keeping backlist SF in print were increasingly given over to Genre Fantasy instead. More than anything else, it was these changes in editorial and commercial policies at publishers that explain why we usually find SF and Fantasy in the same section in bookshops (what the header cards above these bookcases should read, of course, is 'The Fantastic').

Although Fantasy has always been a major element of children's book publishing, the perennial sales of classics of yesteryear by the likes of ›› C.S. Lewis and ›› Susan Cooper did nothing to alert publishers to the massive commercial potential for Genre Fantasy for kids. The reasons for the sudden success of ›› J.K. Rowling can instead be traced to changes in the reading habits of teenagers – in the years before Tolkien's mass popularity and the Genre Fantasy boom of the 1980s, young people were much more likely to read SF, as there was more of it in print. When accessible writers like Brooks, ›› David Eddings and ›› Raymond Feist were joined by the funny, irreverent parodies of ›› Terry Pratchett, the die was cast. Children noticed their elder siblings and peers reading Fantasy, so it was inevitable that an author would take the old idea of an academy for young magicians (a concept pioneered by ›› Ursula Le Guin) and marry it to the classic English school story. The *Harry Potter* books, boosted by word of mouth and the immense marketing power of a mass media that is far bigger than it used to be, became the bestselling novels in the world, even adults rushing out to buy them in their millions. Since Rowling's phenomenal ascent,

publishers have been falling over themselves to replicate the success of her books in the children's market, rather as they did with adult Genre Fantasy in the 1980s. The results have been mixed, with some very formulaic books (and some very good ones, such as ›› Philip Pullman's works) becoming major bestsellers. The audiences for these books, being young, naturally have no experience of reading the important Fantasy masterworks of the previous century. The result is that some largely unoriginal works have become widely acclaimed, a situation not helped by the fact that many mainstream literary critics (who are themselves unfamiliar with Genre Fantasy) have suddenly had to cover the latest pretender to J.K. Rowling's or Philip Pullman's crowns in newspaper reviews without adequate knowledge of the history of Fantasy publishing to make informed judgements.

Finally, the success of Peter Jackson's brilliant film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* have banished any doubts that Fantasy is today the most commercially significant of the fictional genres, even though few other recent Fantasy movies have proved to be as worthwhile. Even SF readers have (confusingly) voted for Fantasy novels to win the coveted Hugo Award for Best SF Novel several times in the past decade, a rare occurrence until recently. At present, it seems that our love affair with Fantasy will remain in its most passionate phase for some time yet, and we hope that this book will help you discover books that will bear you off on incredible adventures you could not have imagined alone. So in true Sword and Sorcery spirit, we invite you to choose your masks, take up your sword and join us, for the battle to come against the dark lords will be both lengthy and thrilling!

Stephen E. Andrews

Bath, 2009

A–Z LIST OF ENTRIES BY AUTHOR

Richard Adams	*Watership Down*
Brian W. Aldiss	*The Malacia Tapestry*
Poul Anderson	*The Broken Sword*
Clive Barker	*Weaveworld*
L. Frank Baum	*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
Peter S. Beagle	*The Last Unicorn*
James Blaylock	*Homunculus*
Jorge Luis Borges	*The Book of Sand*
Ray Bradbury	*Dandelion Wine*
Marion Zimmer Bradley	*The Mists of Avalon*
Terry Brooks	*The Sword of Shannara*
John Brunner	*The Compleat Traveller in Black*
Mikhail Bulgakov	*The Master and Margarita*
Edgar Rice Burroughs	*Tarzan of the Apes*
Italo Calvino	*Invisible Cities*
Jonathan Carroll	*The Land of Laughs*
Lewis Carrol (Martin Gardner, Ed.)	*The Annotated Alice*
Angela Carter	*The Bloody Chamber*
G.K. Chesterton	*The Man Who Was Thursday*

Susanna Clarke	*Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*
Susan Cooper	*Over Sea, Under Stone*
John Crowley	*Little, Big*
Lin Sprague De Camp & Fletcher Pratt	*The Compleat Enchanter*
Gordon R. Dickson	*The Dragon and the George*
Stephen R. Donaldson	*Lord Foul's Bane*
Lord Dunsany	*The King of Elfland's Daughter*
David Eddings	*Pawn of Prophecy*
E.R. Eddison	*The Worm Ouroboros*
Steven Erikson	*Gardens of the Moon*
Philip Jose Farmer	*A Feast Unknown*
Raymond E. Feist	*Magician*
Charles G. Finney	*The Circus of Dr Lao*
Cornelia Funke	*Inkheart*
Neil Gaiman	*Neverwhere*
John Gardner	*Grendel*
Alan Garner	*The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*
Jane Gaskell	*The Serpent*
David Gemmell	*Legend*
Kenneth Grahame	*The Wind in the Willows*
Ken Grimwood	*Replay*
H. Rider Haggard	*She*
M. John Harrison	*The Pastel City*
Lian Hearn	*Across the Nightingale Floor*
James Hilton	*Lost Horizon*
Russell Hoban	*Kleinzeit*
Robert Holdstock	*Mythago Wood*

Robert E. Howard	*The Hour of the Dragon*
C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne	*The Lost Continent*
Tove Jansson	*Comet in Moominland*
Diana Wynne Jones	*Howl's Moving Castle*
Robert Jordan	*The Eye of the World*
Anna Kavan	*Mercury*
Guy Gavriel Kay	*Tigana*
Stephen King	*The Gunslinger*
Tanith Lee	*The Book of the Damned*
Ursula K. Le Guin	*A Wizard of Earthsea*
Fritz Leiber	*Swords and Deviltry*
C.S. Lewis	*The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*
Megan Lindholm	*Wizard of the Pigeons*
David Lindsay	*A Voyage to Arcturus*
H.P. Lovecraft	*At the Mountains of Madness*
Elizabeth A. Lynn	*Watchtower*
George MacDonald	*Lilith*
George R.R. Martin	*A Game of Thrones*
Patricia McKillip	*The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*
A. Merritt	*The Ship of Ishtar*
China Miéville	*Perdido Street Station*
Hope Mirrlees	*Lud-in-the-Mist*
Michael Moorcock	*Elric of Melnibone*
Michael Moorcock	*The City in the Autumn Stars*
Brian Moore	*The Great Victorian Collection*
C.L. Moore	*Black Gods*
William Morris	*The Wood Beyond the World*

Haruki Murakami	*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*
John Myers Myers	*Silverlock*
Robert Nye	*Merlin*
Mervyn Peake	*Titus Groan*
Tim Powers	*The Drawing of the Dark*
Terry Pratchett	*The Colour of Magic*
Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman	*Good Omens*
Philip Pullman	*Northern Lights*
Herbert Read	*The Green Child*
Keith Roberts	*Anita*
J.K. Rowling	*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*
Geoff Ryman	*The Warrior Who Carried Life*
Michael Shea	*Nifft The Lean*
Robert Silverberg	*Lord Valentine's Castle*
Clark Ashton Smith	*The Emperor of Dreams*
Michael Swanwick	*The Iron Dragon's Daughter*
Sheri S. Tepper	*Beauty*
J.R.R. Tolkien	*The Hobbit*
J.R.R. Tolkien	*The Lord of the Rings*
Jack Vance	*The Dying Earth*
T.H. White	*The Sword in the Stone*
Charles Williams	*The War In Heaven*
Tad Williams	*The Dragonbone Chair*
Gene Wolfe	*Peace*
Virginia Woolf	*Orlando*
Austin Tappan Wright	*Islandia*
Roger Zelazny	*Nine Princes in Amber*

A–ZOFENTRIES

RICHARD ADAMS **(b. 1920)** UK

WATERSHIP DOWN (1972)

For much of his working life Richard Adams was a civil servant whose storytelling was restricted to tales he told his daughters as they travelled on long car journeys. Among these tales were the adventures of a group of rabbits. Adams's daughters loved the rabbit stories so much that they insisted that he write them down. The result was *Watership Down*. Adams's narrative focuses on two young rabbits who are brothers. Fiver is a visionary who foresees the destruction of the warren in which the rabbits live; Hazel is the courageous pioneer who, when the older rabbits of the warren refuse to listen to his brother's warning, leads a small band of refugees in search of a new home. After a perilous journey they arrive in Watership Down where they establish a warren. Their troubles, however, are not yet at an end. They come into conflict with a neighbouring warren, ruled by the despotic Woundwort, and are forced to fight a desperate battle to retain the freedom they have gained.

The pitfalls facing an author writing the kind of anthropomorphic adventures Adams was attempting to produce are clear enough: the dangers of descending into tweeness are ever present. However, *Watership Down* is not some kitsch fable about cute bunnies. Rooted in exact observation of the British countryside and of the behaviour of

rabbits in the wild, it is a story that packs a real punch. Adams has always denied that he intended his book to be read as allegory or parable and that may well be true, but much of its power stems from its adoption of themes and motifs from some of the oldest and most basic of stories. Like Homer's *Odyssey*, it is a story of quest and heroism. It just happens to be about rabbits, not Greek warriors.

Film version: *Watership Down* (1978, animation)

Read on
Tales from Watership Down (a collection of short stories published a quarter of a century after the original book); *Shardik*; *The Plague Dogs* Aeron Clement, *The Cold Moons*; Gary Kilworth, *Frost Dancers*; ›› Tad Williams, *Tailchaser's Song*

BRIAN W. ALDISS (b.1925) UK

THE MALACIA TAPESTRY (1976)

Malacia: a city in decay, as breathtaking as Renaissance Florence at her apogee, but with immense saurians toddling around her streets, winged citizens flapping overhead and archaic gods sitting around piazza cafés sipping espresso. Unchanging and yet always seeming at risk of final evanescence, Malacia is the playground of Perian and Guy, who are more refined variants of *Withnail and I*, 'resting' actors apparently more interested in the pursuit of noble maidens than

delivering soliloquies. Insouciantly relaxed, the duo are perfect ambassadors for our exploration of the city.

Enter Otto Bengtsohm, inventor, who rouses Perian into starring in his first zhanoscopic production, which involves a novel device that records and creates a new form of art lying somewhere between a live action movie, a play and an animation. But as this is Malacia, the eternal city of stasis, unforeseeable implications arise from such experimentation, and it transpires that Perian will have to take the kind of unexpected risks endured by knights of yore.

When SF writers holiday in Fantasyland, the results are more often than not special. So when Brian Aldiss (long regarded as one of the finest SF writers ever) created *Malacia*, heads were turned and then some. Although his magnificent book *Hothouse* is nominally SF, its fervid depiction of a distant future Earth spoke of a potentially great loss to Fantasy given Aldiss's concentration on rationalist speculation and general fiction. Luckily, *Malacia* (and some immaculate short stories) made up for his general absence from Fantasy, giving us one of the most entrancing cities ever to grace a genre that already suffers from an embarrassment of urban riches, describing his invention in the sophisticated, lush and amusing prose such a tangy edifice demands. Aldiss has been writing since the 1950s and has produced over one hundred books of consistently outstanding quality, earning him literary awards, an OBE and a global legion of admirers.

Read on

A Romance of the Equator

Mary Gentle, *Rats & Gargoyles*; ›› China Miéville, *King Rat*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *Mother London*; Lucius Shepard, *The Golden*

POUL ANDERSON (1926–2001) USA

THE BROKEN SWORD (1954)

Our first S&S selection is a book published at the same time as *The Fellowship of the Ring*, drawing upon the same mythology, but of a very different character. For while ›› Tolkien's classic is lengthy, dripping with virtuous light, *The Broken Sword* is brief, dark and unremittingly savage, a surging story as sharp as the dragon prow of a Viking longship cleaving icy waves.

Anderson's debt to and understanding of Norse cosmology is undeniable – he was of Danish descent and his northern heritage shows in his sinewy, poetic prose. His pagan tale reveals the ancient conflict between two Faerie peoples – Elves and Trolls. These are not childish beings, but ruthless, eldritch inhumans worried about the growing dominion of man. Siring a changeling on a hideous Troll-woman, scheming Elf Imric secretly switches the warlock babe of the union with the son of a Viking settler in England. Imric then raises Skafloc (the human child) as an Elf, planning to use him against the Trolls, as (unlike the Faerie) the boy can handle iron without being burned and is unaffected by the magic of Christian symbols, thus giving his Elvish masters an advantage in warfare. But a vengeful Witch has plans for the changeling Valgard, a clandestine cuckoo in the nest of his human family, plans that involve his becoming Troll champion. When Skafloc and Valgard clash, there is a tempest such as the world has never known. Only one of these pawns is destined to transcend his fate by ending their enmity and mending the broken sword.

An acknowledged and massive influence upon ›› Moorcock's *Elric* stories with its bleak Euro-centric romanticism, cursed armoury and

unwitting brother–sister incest, this is the most authentically Nordic heroic fantasy novel of modern times, outstripping even ›› Howard's *Conan* in its berserker fury. *The Broken Sword* remains a terse landmark in the history of S&S that everyone interested in Fantasy simply must experience.

Read on

Three Hearts and Three Lions; *Hrolf Kraki's Saga*; *The Merman's Children*

Anonymous, *Beowulf*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *The Knight of the Swords*

CLIVE BARKER (b. 1952) UK

WEAVEWORLD (1987)

The magic carpet is, of course, a staple of Middle Eastern folklore, but it took a British writer to really pull the rug of expectation out from beneath the feet of Fantasy readers at a time when the genre seemed to consist of little but ponderous Tolkien-derived epics or bloated S&S sagas. Clive Barker's weighty tome *Weaveworld* was a substantial hit that (along with *Hellraiser*, a film version of his novella *The Hellbound Heart*) propelled this gifted writer, already acclaimed for his Horror writings, into further fame and fortune.

The novel follows Cal and Susannah, two seemingly ordinary people, who are sucked into a multi-faceted dimension called The Fugue via a

portal hidden in the fabric of a carpet. The inhabitants of this fascinating domain, the Seerkind, are therein concealed from the Scourge, a destructive force bent on rending the weft and thread of the carpet and destroying them. But the Scourge is not the only threat to menace the Seerkind, for Immocolata, a ravishing but twisted exile from the Weaveworld, accompanied by the repulsive Shadwell (who can sell anything to anyone) and Hobart, a fascistic police inspector, has plans of her own for the region within the rainbow textile. ***Weaveworld*** is both painstakingly crafted and astonishingly original. After this triumph, Barker's prose took on more of the hollow sheen of the transatlantic blockbuster, as he aimed for mass sales in the USA, and he lost some of his peculiarly English (yet never parochial) lyricism. ***Weaveworld*** was a major factor in propelling Barker to international fame, but he has never topped its awesome tapestry of invention and adventure. It is a work that never seems shallow and is consistently diverting across seven hundred pages which flicker through a spectrum of emotions and concepts to put many other so-called Fantasy writers to shame.

Read on

Cabal; *The Great and Secret Show*

Andrew Davidson, *The Gargoyle*; Stephen King & Peter Straub, *The Talisman*; ›› Terry Pratchett, *The Carpet People*

L. FRANK BAUM (1856–1919) USA

THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ (1900)

Lyman Frank Baum had already had a chequered career as a largely unsuccessful magazine editor, travelling salesman, playwright, children's author and storekeeper when he finally hit the big time with the publication of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, one of the most enduringly popular of all American children's books. In his introduction to the story, Baum described his intentions in writing the story of Dorothy and her travels in Oz. The time, he thought, had come for newer 'wonder tales', ones in which 'the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale'. His aim was to produce a story in which 'the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out'. The result was the tale of an ordinary young girl from Kansas who is swept up by a tornado and deposited, together with her dog Toto, in the strange land of Oz. Her only hope of returning to her prairie home is to journey to the Emerald City and there consult with the Wizard who rules it. She sets off along the road of yellow brick to the city and soon falls in with the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman and the Cowardly Lion who are to be her companions on the road. After many adventures, they arrive at their destination only to discover that the Wizard is not quite the all-powerful magician they have been led to believe he is and that they need to depend on their own resources to gain what they most desire.

With *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum succeeded in his aim of writing a new 'wonder tale' for new times. He created a peculiarly American children's fantasy which could compete with the fairy tales of

the Old World. Oz, revisited in many sequels, has become a familiar part of the imaginative landscape of generations of children, both in the US and worldwide.

Film version: *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)

Sequels: *The Marvellous Land of Oz*; *Ozma of Oz*; *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz*; *The Road to Oz*; *The Emerald City of Oz*; *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*; *Tik-Tok of Oz*; *The Scarecrow of Oz*; *Rinkitink in Oz*; *The Lost Princess of Oz*; *The Tin Woodman of Oz*; *The Magic of Oz*; *Glinda of Oz*

(After Baum's death, the Oz series was continued by other authors, most notably Ruth Plumly Thompson. For details of these further sequels, see the most comprehensive Oz website at http://thewizardofoz.info).

Read on

Carlo Collodi, *Pinocchio*; ›› Philip Jose Farmer, *A Barnstormer in Oz*; Hugh Lofting, *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*; Gregory Maguire, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (a revisionist version of Oz, making use of elements of Baum's stories but intended for adults rather than children)

READONATHEME: CLASSIC CHILDREN'S FANTASY

Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
Ted Hughes, *The Iron Man*
Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*
Clive King, *Stig of the Dump*
Charles Kingsley, *The Water Babies*
Edith Nesbit, *Five Children and It*
Mary Norton, *The Borrowers*
P.L. Travers, *Mary Poppins*
E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

PETER S. BEAGLE (b. 1939) USA

THE LAST UNICORN (1968)

Peter S. Beagle has written fantasy fiction for nearly fifty years. His first novel, *A Fine and Private Place*, a story of ghosts finding love in a limbo land between life and death, appeared when he was still in his teens and he has since published several further novels and dozens of short stories. He has also written works for TV and the movies, including the teleplay for one of the best known episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the screenplay for the 1978 animated version of *The*

Lord of the Rings. However his most famous work by far is *The Last Unicorn*, a novel that, forty years after it was first published, still regularly appears in lists of the best fantasy fiction of all time.

The book opens in a forest where a unicorn overhears two hunters talking. One is convinced that unicorns are long gone; the other believes that there is but one left in the world. The unicorn who has long been accustomed to her solitary status begins to wonder whether or not others of her kind do still exist in the world. Eventually she decides she must leave her forest to discover the truth. Her journey takes her out of the tranquil haven she has so far inhabited and into the more cruel and dangerous world beyond its boundaries. Imprisonment in a carnival menagerie awaits her but, once she has escaped this fate, she joins forces with Schmendrick, a would-be magician, and a young woman named Molly Grue to track down the Red Bull, the creature responsible for driving the other unicorns from the land.

The premise of Beagle's book might suggest a rather fey and whimsical tale but what he gives readers is a notably unsentimental, often comic work of fantasy which none the less plays cleverly with ideas about the place of magic and imagination in the world.

Film version: *The Last Unicorn* (1982, animation, screenplay by Beagle)

Read on

A Fine and Private Place; *The Unicorn Sonata*

Michael Bishop, *Unicorn Mountain*; William Goldman, *The Princess Bride*; ›› Tanith Lee, *Black Unicorn*

JAMES BLAYLOCK (b.1950) USA

HOMUNCULUS (1986)

How can essence of carp make you immortal? Why are Californian authors who all knew SF writer Philip K. Dick fascinated by Victorian London? Is it possible to eat a gallon of ice cream without feeling nauseous? All these questions and more arise when investigating the overwhelming and mildly queasy world of James Blaylock's ***St. Ives*** series.

Just before dawn on one morning in 1870, an airship piloted by a skeleton skims above Piccadilly. A villainous hunchback performs resurrection experiments. Aquaria are mysteriously burgled. A prototype spaceship is accidentally launched and crashes in the grounds of a country estate. Strangeness abounds, and Langdon St. Ives and his fellow adventurers of the Trismegistus Club investigate, uncovering an infernal conspiracy set in motion by a Moriarty-like figure. From Jermyn Street to Limehouse, from the living dead to alchemy, ***Homunculus*** is one of the wildest explorations of gaslight London in fiction. With flashes of Verne, Poe, Twain, Conan Doyle illuminated by psychedelic weirdness, Blaylock injects the kind of laughing-gas mayhem back into fantasy that readers will either relish or loathe. Although logic appears to play little part in his plotting, Blaylock's inventiveness is stupefying. More H.P. Lovecraft than Alan Moore, more Terry Gilliam than Oscar Wilde, ***Homunculus*** sometimes makes no sense, which is exactly the point. While there is much that is simply excessive and silly about Blaylock, all of his writing is charmingly over-the-top and flavoursome. Throwing caution to the dogs, fans of Sherlock Holmes, Professor Challenger, the League of Extraordinary

Gentlemen and *Time After Time* should all delve into this nuttiest of steampunk fantasies. Confidant of Tim Powers and K.W. Jeter (see *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*), Blaylock, together with his fellow Californian dreamers, has perhaps done more to reinvigorate Victorian London for readers than any British authors. An English teacher, tropical fish hobbyist and amateur carpenter, Blaylock is a reminder that, sometimes, unbounded imagination for its own sake is enough.

✍ **Sequels:** *Lord Kelvin's Machine*; *The Digging Leviathan*

Read on
The Elfin Ship
Peter Ackroyd, *Hawksmoor*; ›› Philip Jose Farmer, *The Grand Adventure*; K.W. Jeter, *Infernal Devices*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *The Metatemporal Detective*

JORGE LUIS BORGES (1899–1986) ARGENTINA

THE BOOK OF SAND (1975)

The Book of Sand in Borges's eponymous tale contains every story ever written. Open it, and the text is never the same twice. It offers surprises each time the reader leafs through its pages, but the stories, once read, can never be found between the boards again. A metaphor for the

nature of reading, the eponymous story and the others to be found in the volume entitled *The Book of Sand* encourage us to ponder the matter of text itself and to consider the eternities libraries create and span. As we change, books appear inviolate, but our perception of a tale alters as our imaginative contribution to the act of reading evolves with age, and we become the other when our mental collaboration with the author flowers or evanesces.

A man encounters his younger self while sitting at a riverside bench one evening. Another returns to a house he knew as a boy, which was sold to a stranger who vanishes, and, while exploring the deserted building late one night, senses the presence of something unearthly. A third storyteller enters into a cool tryst with a Norwegian woman who seems to carry the spirit of the Aesir within her, while a dweller in ancient Midgard slays a fool-cum-king who carries a divine disk that only has one side. The individuals who relate these tales are different, yet their voices are unmistakably that of the author himself, all of their stories shifting and lost in the desert that is The Book of Sand.

Borges was the precursor of the school of Latin American modern fiction known as Magical Realism and is regarded as a major figure in modern literature. His eyesight was weak and he wrote no novels but his disarmingly modest, slender stories are substantial enough. Throughout his writing life, Borges was an unrepentant acolyte of Poe, ›› Lovecraft and Wells. His late work is neglected in comparison to his more feted early material, but *The Book of Sand* is a thematically perfect introduction to the recurrent contemplations of The Fantastic's premiere figurehead.

Read on

The Book of Imaginary Beings

Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly*; ›› Italo Calvino, *Time and the Hunter*; Lucius Shepard, *Kalimantan*; Patrick Suskind, *Perfume*

READONATHEME: FABULATION

Self-conscious, (post) modern fantasies by literary mages

Paul Auster, *Vertigo*
J.G. Ballard, *The Unlimited Dream Company*
John Barth, *Chimera*
Donald Barthelme, *The King*
Dino Buzzati, *The Tartar Steppe*
›› Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*
Adolfo Bioy Casares, *The Invention of Morel*
Samuel R. Delany, *Tales of Neveryon*
Karen Joy Fowler, *Sarah Canary*
Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*

RAY BRADBURY (b. 1920) USA

DANDELION WINE (collected 1957)

June 1928: school's out for brothers Douglas and Thomas Spaulding who live in Green Town, Illinois, running barefoot in the grass, eating ice cream, urging a local inventor to build a happiness machine, relishing the seemingly absolute freedom of childhood. Collecting myriads of yellow flower-heads from the lawn, Grandfather Spaulding will press the blooms, letting them ferment into dandelion wine, the bottled essence of July that the family enjoys as a winter tonic. Douglas in particular is intoxicated by this glorious season, for he has just realised something – he is alive and for the first time, fully aware of the fact. On the cusp of manhood, senses rose-tinted by his unmentioned puberty, the burgeoning fecundity of Douglas' adolescent imagination is fired by the quirky yet wise homespun philosophy of his small Midwestern town acquaintances, his every waking moment a hymn to the profundity of imagination. He is a boy of summer, a time when nothing is ordinary and existence itself is sublime.

Our memories are perhaps the greatest fantasies of all. We embroider our recollections as much as we truly remember them, but our nostalgic tendencies to build castles in the air are vindicated as more vital than our adult cynicism by the singing gift of Ray Bradbury. Masterfully reassuring us that even a simple life is filled with wonder if we have the courage to use our discernment, *Dandelion Wine* is perhaps the finest novel by this sovereign of prose stylists. For although nothing genuinely supernatural happens in Douglas Spaulding's 1928, this is a book which nevertheless overflows with authentic magic.

Bradbury may be most celebrated for his almost pastoral (though nonetheless chilling) SF novels, but the majority of his output is fantasy – some of it gentle, much of it frightening, all of it lyrical and wise. He has been dismissed as sentimental by some critics but the fact remains that, in Bradbury's hands, many readers really have experienced the body electric promised by poets. Ray Bradbury found critical acclaim beyond his pulp magazine origins almost immediately and today he remains revered worldwide as a crown prince of fanciful fiction.

✍ **Sequel:** *Farewell Summer*

Read on ›› Angela Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*; **››** Alan Garner, *Red Shift*; Garry Kilworth, *Witchwater Country*; **››** Ursula K. Le Guin, *Tehanu*

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY (1930–99) USA

THE MISTS OF AVALON (1982)

Arthurian mythology has long been an inspiration for fantasy writers and many have chosen to re-tell and re-imagine the tales. Until the publication of *The Mists of Avalon*, most Arthurian fantasies kept the masculine perspective of the original stories. Marion Zimmer Bradley's book, with its portrait of Morgaine (Morgan le Fay) as a priestess of the Mother Goddess struggling against patriarchal Christianity, was different. Here was an unmistakably feminist interpretation of the myths. The

novel opens in the isolated Cornish castle of Tintagel where Igraine, the wife of Duke Gorlois, has just given birth to Morgaine. The narrative follows the girl as she grows up and is sent to Avalon to be trained as a priestess in the old religion. Meanwhile a half-brother to Morgaine, a son of Igraine and Uther Pendragon named Arthur, is being groomed to be king and to uphold the beliefs of the priestesses of Avalon. However, new and powerful ideas are on the march and, when Arthur comes to the throne and marries Gwenhyfar, these take the ascendant. Christianity becomes the ideology of the nation and Morgaine and her older beliefs must struggle to survive.

Even before the appearance of *The Mists of Avalon*, Marion Zimmer Bradley was a prolific and much-admired writer of both fantasy and science fiction. She began publishing her stories in the SF magazines of the 1950s and reached a large audience with her ***Darkover*** novels, set on a planet of that name where psychic powers flourish among the inhabitants. The ***Darkover*** books brought her much acclaim but her greatest achievement is undoubtedly *The Mists of Avalon*. It remains a controversial work and not everyone likes its revisionist version of familiar stories but it is a novel which has been rightly called 'a worthy addition to almost a thousand years of Arthurian tradition'.

Prequels: *The Forest House*; *Lady of Avalon*

Read on

Vera Chapman, *The King's Damosel*; Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances* (how the tales were told in the Middle Ages); Rosalind Miles, *The Queen of the Summer Country* (first of a trilogy of novels about Guenevere)

TERRY BROOKS (b. 1944) USA

THE SWORD OF SHANNARA

Series: Shannara

We find ourselves on Earth, long after a nuclear holocaust has destroyed our technological civilisation. Magic and its attendant beings, the Elves, have returned from time's abyss, reigning over our descendants, while the fallout of previous millennia has resulted in mutations: some people have evolved into dwarves, gnomes and trolls.

Young Shea Ohmsford is a human-elf hybrid, who, as our story opens, does not realise that he is of royal blood. Urged to find the fabled sword of Shannara by the druid Allanon, a somewhat unreliable narrator whose talent for misdirection is balanced by his generally benign nature, Shea must undertake a perilous quest to defeat the malign Warlock Lord, all the time evading the demonic Skull Bearers, the be-winged nemesis of Shea and his bold companions.

Why was ***Shannara*** so successful, when beforehand S&S was a minor interest genre? Was it merely because no publisher before Del Rey (see the introduction for the story behind the book's publication) had realised readers were eager for more Tolkien-sized trilogies? The critics have not been kind to the novel, claiming it is merely derivative of *Lord of the Rings*. Brooks himself has never broadly denied this, although he has addressed specific points such as the resemblance between Shea and his companions and Tolkien's hobbits. Many readers have enjoyed the novel for exactly this reason and very few of them suggest ***Shannara*** is an original work. Instead they claim Brooks is an entertaining craftsman who works within the tradition established by Tolkien. As an exercise in imagination, the series is at worst formulaic (a

major sin in a genre which prides itself on imagination as its cardinal virtue), but as a pleasantly diverting escapist page-turner, the books clearly have many merits. Yet to understand where the avalanche of fantasy sagas bookshops have been crammed with for the last quarter-century has come from, *Shannara* is nevertheless essential reading and its enduring popularity seems unassailable.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Elfstones of Shannara*; *The Wishsong of Shannara* (for information on further sequels, visit www.terrybrooks.net)

Read on
Magic Kingdom For Sale – Sold!
Marianne Curley, *The Named*; Garth Nix, *Sabriel*; Christopher Paolini, *Eragon*

JOHN BRUNNER (1934–95) UK

THE COMPLEAT TRAVELLER IN BLACK (collected 1987)

Rationality and science are lost in the mists of spacetime. Did they ever really exist, or has their era yet to come? Only the Traveller in Black may know, a deceptively quiet man with a snow-white beard, hooded cape and a seemingly innocent staff. For the Traveller is the only being abroad with one nature despite his many names. As he walks through the lands of men like some holy pilgrim, from hale village to rude

hamlet, enigmatic and dignified, the Traveller dispenses hexes in a stately battle against the forces of chaos that blacken men's lives. Only the Traveller can win this war and usher in a new era, for his sole nature frees him from the restrictions that bind others. But can even his wisdom, judgement and power thwart the Lords of entropy?

John Brunner's *Traveller in Black* stories are told in a voice as measured and distinctive as the unforgettable character himself. Instead of the flashy abracadabras of more blustery fantasy figures, the Traveller's confidence in his own mystic abilities shine forth in his urbane, calm manner. While innkeepers, noblemen, warriors and wenches are in uproar about him, the Traveller keeps his head. Brunner has Tolkien's lightness of touch, tempering this with a mildly sardonic, observational approach to the storytelling. He clearly knew his classics, too, as the quality of the writing is timeless and assured. Altogether, this is genre fantasy of a most luxurious cut.

John Brunner was best known for his SF, which he started publishing at the age of seventeen. Although he generally stuck with interstellar empires and dystopian futures, he was a writer of many talents, producing books in various genres. The Traveller remains one of his most memorable characters.

See also: *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*

Read on

John Grant, *The World*; L.E. Modesitt, *The Magic of Recluce*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *Stormbringer*; Susan Shwartz, *Grail of Hearts*; Cherry Wilder, *A Princess of the Chameln*

MIKHAIL BULGAKOV (1891–1940) RUSSIA

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA (1967)

Mikhail Bulgakov's life and work were shaped by the Russian Revolution and by the society which emerged from it. He was born and brought up in Kiev in the Ukraine, then part of the Tsarist Russian Empire. As a young and newly qualified doctor he served in field hospitals during the civil war that followed the 1917 Bolshevik seizure of power and, when he gave up medicine for literature, his writing reflected his deep ambivalence about the brave new world into which his fellow citizens were being led. During his lifetime Bulgakov was known primarily as a dramatist and a number of his plays were performed at the Moscow Arts Theatre. Indeed Stalin himself was an admirer of Bulgakov's work for the theatre. In private, however, the writer was fiercely critical of the Soviet regime and produced a sequence of satirical works mocking its attempts to refashion society. None of these could be published at the time they were written and Bulgakov died without the chance of seeing them in print. His masterpiece was *The Master and Margarita* but, although it had circulated in samizdat form for many years, it was not properly published until decades after his death.

Beginning with the arrival in Moscow of the Devil, disguised as a black magician named Woland, *The Master and Margarita* opens out into a many-layered narrative involving a persecuted and paranoid genius (The Master) who has written an unpublished novel about Pontius Pilate and his one true love (Margarita) who enters into a pact with the Devil to redeem her lover. Flitting between competing stories (we get to read some of the Master's novel as well as witnessing the

Devil's trickery in Moscow), the book is an extraordinary work, part fantasy and part satire but wholly original.

Read on

The Fatal Eggs; *Heart of a Dog*

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Double*; Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister*; Victor Pelevin, *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS **(1875–1950)** USA

TARZAN OF THE APES (1912)

Shipwrecked on the coast of equatorial Africa, John Clayton (Lord Greystoke) and his wife Alice build a tree-house to shelter from jungle predators. Having seen a massive, manlike figure in the rainforest, Greystoke is worried: Alice is pregnant and vulnerable. But soon after the birth of their son, Alice is attacked in the tree-house by Kerchak, a gigantic ape of a species unknown to science. A year later, the Claytons are both dead and their infant son is borne away from his makeshift crib by Kala, a female ape whose own baby has recently perished. The boy is raised by the anthropoids and when he reaches manhood, challenges the bellicose Kerchak's leadership of the apes. Tarzan may be the living embodiment of Rousseau's Noble Savage, but a Noble Man's blood runs in his veins and nothing can halt his ascent to mastery of the beasts. Emperor of all he surveys, everything changes for the new Lord

Greystoke when explorers from America (including the lovely Jane Porter) discover his jungle demesne.

Is Tarzan fantasy? Burroughs expert ›› Philip Jose Farmer insists the book is SF, citing the quasi-hominid nature of the apes, suggesting they are an archaic species of proto-human. But aside from these cryptozoological conundrums, the Africa of *Tarzan* is an unrealistic one, owing more to Haggard and similar writers than to actual observation. Despite its ambiguous genre status, *Tarzan* displays vast iconic power that even Burroughs' sometimes crude writing cannot weaken. As an inspirational work of adventure fiction and a phenomenal bestseller, its influential power over genre writers is unsurpassed. Together with Burroughs' Mars, Venus and Caprona series, it remains one of the vital motherlodes of escapism and a landmark in publishing history.

Film version: *Greystoke* (1984)

Sequels: Burroughs wrote 23 sequels to *Tarzan* – refer to official website www.tarzan.org for a full bibliography

Read on A.A. Attanasio, *Wyvern*; ›› Philip Jose Farmer (ed), *Mother Was A Lovely Beast*; Neville Farki, *The Death of Tarzana Clayton*; Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*; Sir Ronald Ross, *Child of the Ocean*

ITALO CALVINO (1923–85) ITALY

INVISIBLE CITIES (1972)

Much of Italo Calvino's work consists of surrealist tales which draw upon not only the legends of his native Italy and the traditions of European folklore but also SF and the work of experimental writers like Kafka and ›› Borges. The style is lucid and poetic; the events, however bizarre their starting point, follow each other logically and persuasively; the overall effect is magical. The people in *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* are struck magically dumb and have to tell each other stories using nothing but tarot cards. In *The Baron in the Trees*, the full-length novel which together with two long stories makes up the omnibus volume entitled *Our Ancestors*, a boy abandons the ground for the treetops and lives his entire life without ever again coming down to earth.

In *Invisible Cities* the traveller Marco Polo diverts the emperor Kublai Khan with the tales of the cities he has seen on his journeys. From Diomira, a city with 'sixty silver domes, bronze statues of all the gods, streets paved with lead, a crystal theatre and a golden cock that crows each morning on a tower' to Fedora, a city filled with glass globes in which its inhabitants can see models of the Fedoras that might have been if its history had been different, the Venetian describes the places he has visited (in reality and in imagination) to the ageing and jaded emperor. The novel has no plot and no characters in the conventional sense. It is simply a collection of one- or two-page descriptions of these fantastical cities, interspersed with brief dialogues between the emperor and the traveller in which they muse upon the ideas and feelings the cities arouse in them. Calvino's abridged narrative technique should not work but it does. The cumulative effect of making his

invisible cities briefly visible is to stimulate and feed the imagination in ways that many longer stories cannot match.

Read on

Our Ancestors

Jim Crace, *Continent*; William Hjortsberg, *Odd Corners*; Jan Morris, *Hav*; Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

READONATHEME: METROPOLIS

The Fantastic character of mysterious literary city-states

Peter Ackroyd, *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*
Paul Auster, *City of Glass*
K.J. Bishop, *The Etched City*
Paul Di Filippo, *A Year in the Linear City*
Christopher Fowler, *Roofworld*
›› China Mieville, *City of the City*
›› Geoff Ryman, *VAO*
Iain Sinclair, *Radon Daughters*
Catherynne M. Valente, *Palimpsest*
Jeff Vandermeer, *City of Saints and Madmen*

JONATHAN CARROLL (b. 1949) USA

THE LAND OF LAUGHS (1980)

The son of a Hollywood scriptwriter and a Broadway actress, Jonathan Carroll has written more than a dozen novels in the last thirty years but he remains best known for his first book. *The Land of Laughs* is not only the title of Carroll's novel. It is also the title of a work by the late Marshall France, 'the very mysterious, very wonderful author of the greatest children's books in the world' who is at the heart of the narrative. Carroll's protagonist, Thomas Abbey, the son of a famous film star, is obsessed by Marshall France's writings. Together with his girlfriend Saxony, another Marshall France devotee, he arrives in the author's hometown of Galen, Missouri to research his life. Intent on writing a biography of his hero, Thomas has been warned that France's daughter Anna is difficult and unlikely to offer him much assistance but he finds, to his surprise, that Anna and the other residents of Galen are only too eager to welcome him into their midst. However, there are small hints that not all is well. Unfortunate accidents occur. The townsfolk make puzzling and enigmatic remarks which Thomas and Saxony are unable to interpret. As the narrative progresses, oddity mounts on oddity until Thomas begins to doubt his sanity. A woman appears to metamorphose into one of the characters from Marshall France's fiction; Thomas hears a bull terrier talking to itself in its sleep. Slowly, the would-be biographer comes to appreciate the extraordinary truth about Galen and the power of Marshall France's imagination. *The Land of Laughs* is a book of enigmatic originality. A strange combination of fantasy and mystery, it draws readers into a world where fiction has a chillingly literal ability to recreate and reinvent reality.

Read on
Bones of the Moon; *Kissing the Beehive*; *Black Cocktail*
Graham Joyce, *Dreamside*; Diane Setterfield, *The Thirteenth Tale*

LEWIS CARROLL (aka CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON) (1832–98) UK

THE ANNOTATED ALICE (edited by Martin Gardner, 1960)

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) are amongst the most acclaimed novels for children ever written, revealing the bizarre, nonsensical dreams of their charmingly stubborn and self-possessed heroine. While the first of Alice's sleep fantasies revolves around cards, the latter is loosely based upon a chess game. Despite the suggestions of underlying logic, rules and order these clues indicate, most readers tend to assume that the books are merely simple nonsense of the classic English variety, or at best seminal works of surrealism, especially when their basic oddness overflows into edgy unpleasantness.

Once Alice tumbles down a rabbit hole (the episodic plots of the books are justifiably famous, so we will not recount them here), a guide to Lewis Carroll's inspirations and thinking – he was a mathematician who taught at Oxford University – can be of enormous help to the reader who wants to do more than merely enjoy Carroll's wild imagination. Martin Gardner's annotated edition contains numerous diverting and revelatory footnotes alongside the text (plus the celebrated illustrations

by John Tenniel), unveiling the mathematical paradoxes, theories of logic and topography, lexicographical codes and philosophy concealed in the very surfaces of Alice's adventures. Gardner accomplishes this without spoiling the fun, his analysis deepening our appreciation of Carroll's psychedelic wizardry.

Carroll is a controversial figure, his reputation besmirched by the idea that he was a paedophile, a theory unsupported by anything other than circumstantial evidence – his affiliations with the Pre-Raphaelites and his related aesthetic interests were not unusual for their time, so his fascination with children may well have been entirely innocent. One thing is certain: his characters and imagery remain as startling and unique as they were to Victorian eyes.

Film versions: *Alice in Wonderland* (1951, Disney animation); *Alice in Wonderland* (1966, TV version directed by Jonathan Miller); *Alice in Wonderland* (1972, musical version)

Read on *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (the original version of Alice's first dreamscape)
Gilbert Adair, *Alice Through the Needle's Eye*; ›› Philip Jose Farmer, *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*; Jeff Noon, *Automated Alice*; Margaret Weis & Martin H. Greenberg (eds), *Fantastic Alice*

ANGELA CARTER (1940–92) UK

THE BLOODY CHAMBER (collected 1979)

Long before she was a fashionable name dropped in the Sunday supplements, Angela Carter was revered by serious Fantasy readers. Despite competition from the many brilliant British women writers of her generation who arose in the wake of 1960s feminism, Carter possessed the unique ability to reveal her viscera as well as her brains in a manner that not only outshone her sister-authors, but also matched the skills of stylistically equivalent male contemporaries such as ›› Moorcock, ›› Nye and Anthony Burgess. Her carnivalesque sensibility is often described as post-modern, but it is actually as eternal as that of her folky, mythic and classical influences. Despite her relevance today (she is now the most studied contemporary female author in British universities), Carter's work contains as much of the past of storytelling as the present and is all the more relevant for this.

The Bloody Chamber is a thematic collection of incandescent stories that draw upon fairy tales and gothic horror. Carter's cardinal intention in them is to remind us of the sensual, animal nature of our bodies by invoking the simultaneously cosy and nightmarish alter egos of our pets. The innocent archetypes of pussy cat and puppy dog are usurped by werewolves and vampires in these vignettes, which re-examine familiar characters like Beauty and the Beast, Puss-in-Boots and Little Red Riding Hood, from a knowing, lusty perspective. Yet Carter's stories are more than academic exercises in unveiling the obvious Freudian symbolism of folk-tales: instead, they remind us of the vitality of simple storytelling. All fire, ice, blood and semen, Carter's faerie yarns are as honest as they are clever, lively in their clipped lushness, crafted with a

consummate wordplay that is breathtakingly ardent. Dying tragically young of cancer, Carter wrote several novels that can be claimed for the fantasy genre, but *The Bloody Chamber* is the best possible introduction to her ravishing body of work.

Film version: *The Company of Wolves* (1984, adapting 'The Company of Wolves' and elements of 'Wolf-Alice')

Read on

The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr Hoffman; *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders*

Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen), *Winter's Tales*; ›› Anna Kavan, *Eagle's Nest*; ›› Robert Nye, *Out of the World and Back Again*

G.K. CHESTERTON (1874–1936) UK

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY (1908)

G.K. Chesterton was a prolific writer, able to exercise his gift for wit and paradox in a wide range of literary forms. He is probably best known for his crime stories featuring Father Brown, an unassuming Roman Catholic priest who solves apparently insoluble mysteries through logic and his knowledge of the human heart. However, his very first novel was fantasy (*The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is set in a future London where one man insists on the independence of his neighbourhood) and he

wrote several other books which can be so classified. Of these, the most interesting is *The Man Who Was Thursday*. Its hero is Gabriel Syme, a poet and 'a very mild-looking mortal, with a fair, pointed beard and faint, yellow hair', who finds himself one afternoon in the London suburb of 'Saffron Park' (loosely modelled on Bedford Park) where he is drawn into a philosophical debate about anarchy and the arts with another poet named Lucian Gregory. Gregory is a fiery revolutionary who offers to introduce him to the hidden world of London anarchists. Before long, Syme has been elected on to the Central Anarchist Council. Each of the men on the council is given the code name of a day of the week and Syme becomes Thursday. The president of the council, a man who inspires awe in all his subordinates, is named Sunday. What the anarchists do not know is that Syme is a police detective. What Syme does not know is that so too are most of the other council members. One by one, they reveal themselves, during a mad chase across England and France in order to prevent a planned assassination in Paris and the novel culminates in a weird country-house party at which the real and enigmatic identity of Sunday emerges.

An unlikely combination of religious allegory, spy fiction and slapstick comedy, *The Man Who Was Thursday* shows the endlessly versatile Chesterton at his best.

Read on

The Napoleon of Notting Hill; *The Club of Queer Trades* (short stories) Jack London, *The Assasination Bureau*; Arthur Machen, *The Hill of Dreams*; Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade*; ›› Charles Williams, *All Hallows' Eve*

SUSANNA CLARKE (b. 1959) UK

JONATHAN STRANGE AND MR NORRELL (2004)

One of the most eagerly awaited first novels in recent years was *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* which Bloomsbury eventually published in 2004, more than a decade after its author, Susanna Clarke, began it. Clarke's short stories, many of them set in the same world as her debut novel, had appeared in magazines and small-press publications throughout the late 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century. They had suggested that a major work of fantasy was in the offing and, when it finally appeared, *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* did not disappoint. Here was an unarguably ambitious and innovative novel.

The book is set in an alternative version of early nineteenth-century England. Real historical figures, from Byron to the Duke of Wellington, populate its pages but the country they inhabit is one where magic is respected and acknowledged. When the novel opens (at a meeting in York in the autumn of 1806), however, the study of English magic is a theoretical one, conducted by gentlemen and scholars for purely antiquarian reasons. Only when one scholar, Mr Norrell, is found who can use magic in the real world does the study of the subject seem to have a practical application. Norrell and his pupil, the aristocratic Jonathan Strange, are invited to put their skills in the service of their country and employ the magic they have mastered in the war against Napoleon. As Clarke's epic narrative unfolds, complete with scholarly footnotes and clever pastiche of nineteenth-century writers, a growing rivalry between Norrell and Strange threatens to destroy both the magic they have revived and their own futures. 'I wanted to explore my ideas

of the fantastic,' Susanna Clarke has said of her motives in writing the book, 'as well as my ideas of England and my attachment to English landscape.' In *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* she has triumphantly done that and much more.

Read on

The Ladies of Grace Adieu (short stories related to *Jonathan Strange*) G.W. Dahlquist, *The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters*; Naomi Novik, *Temeraire* (first of a sequence of novels set in a Napoleonic world where dragons have replaced fighting ships); Christopher Priest, *The Prestige*; Scarlett Thomas, *The End of Mr Y*

READONATHEME: HISTORICAL FANTASY

Fiction where historical realities and fantasy worlds meet and mingle

Orson Scott Card, *Seventh Son*
C.J. Cherryh, *Rusalka*
Avram Davidson, *The Phoenix and the Mirror*
Nigel Frith, *Olympiad*
›› David Gemmell, *Lord of the Silver Bow*
›› Guy Gavriel Kay, *The Lions of Al-Rassan*
Jasper Kent, *Twelve*
Juliet Marillier, *Wolfskin*
Delia Sherman, *The Porcelain Dove*
›› Gene Wolfe, *Soldier of the Mist*

SUSAN COOPER (b. 1935) UK

OVER SEA, UNDER STONE (1965)

***Series: The Dark Is Rising* Sequence**

Children's fantasy has become very hot property in the years since ›› J.K. Rowling appeared, with publishers falling over themselves to find new authors and film-makers jumping on the bandwagon by finally adapting for the big screen books they have optioned many times over the years. One of the more unsuccessful fantasy movies of recent times was *The Dark is Rising*, which failed to capture the tone and complexities of what is possibly the finest British fantasy series for children of the 1960s and 1970s. *Over Sea, Under Stone* is the prelude to the series, which slips into high gear in the second volume, *The Dark is Rising*.

The book begins traditionally enough in its depiction of the typically English and wholesome Drew family as they arrive at the seaside home of Great Uncle Merriman but the lightness of this tale of hidden stairwells, a cryptic map and a quest for treasure during school summer holidays conceals layers of symbolism that become more explicit as the series progresses. Each book represents a season, whose turnings unveil an eternal battle between the archaic forces of good and evil that draws on many fantasy traditions, especially that of Arthurian myth. Time paradoxes, the ever-threatening presence of chaos and a growing sense of unease build steadily throughout this magnificent story, winding the reader's nerves into tight knots of anticipation as the shadows gradually swell, especially when Will Stanton – the seventh son of a seventh son – joins the cast, and the action shifts from a fabulously eerie Cornwall to an eldritch rural Wales.

As a journalist, Susan Cooper worked with Ian Fleming before becoming a full-time novelist. *The Grey King* won the Newbery Medal, cementing Cooper's already sterling reputation as a key figure in modern children's literature. She has lived in the USA for many years, now residing in Massachusetts, the setting for several ›› Lovecraft-flavoured tales she has written.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Dark Is Rising*; *Greenwitch*; *The Grey King*; *Silver on the Tree*

Read on

Seaward; *Victory*

Joan Aiken, *The Shadow Guests*; Peter Dickinson, *The Kin*; Garry Kilworth, *The Drowners*

JOHN CROWLEY (b. 1942) USA

LITTLE, BIG (1981)

›› Ursula K. Le Guin has described *Little, Big* as a book that 'all by itself calls for a redefinition of fantasy'. The literary critic Harold Bloom has dubbed it 'a neglected masterpiece' and 'the closest achievement we have to the Alice stories of ›› Lewis Carroll'. Certainly Crowley's elegant narrative is one of the most unusual and unforgettable fantasy works of the last fifty years. At its heart lie one extended family, the Drinkwaters,

and their ambivalent relationship with the world of 'faerie'. The family home is Edgewood, a mysterious mansion in the New England countryside. As the book opens, Smoky Barnable is travelling by foot from the City (clearly New York, even if this is hardly ever explicitly acknowledged) to Edgewood. He is on his way there to claim his bride, Daily Alice Drinkwater, and, although he does not yet know it, he is about to be drawn into the strange world she and her relations inhabit. The novel becomes a strange, dream-like version of a family saga. As the narrative makes its leisurely progress through five hundred pages, it moves back into the past to examine the circumstances in which the Drinkwater fairies first arrived in America from the shires of England and fast forwards to reveal an unexpected future. The story of generations of Drinkwaters, interacting with one another and with the creatures with whom they share Edgewood, slowly unfolds. The family may have fairies at the bottom of their garden but these fairies are not quite the beings we know from the stories of our childhood. In truth, they are glimpsed only occasionally but the sense that they are ever-present, that there is a parallel world forever abutting on to the mundane world and intermingling with it is brilliantly conveyed in Crowley's delicate and allusive prose.

Read on

The Solitudes

Keith Donohue, *The Stolen Child*; Mark Helprin, *Winter's Tale*; Graham Joyce, *The Tooth Fairy*

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP (1907–2000) & FLETCHER PRATT (1897–1956) USA

THE COMPLEAT ENCHANTER (collected 1975)

When writing fantasy, some authors – particularly if they have a background in hard SF – are not entirely comfortable with the anything-goes facility the presence of magic in a story allows them. But this was not a problem for the authors of *The Compleat Enchanter*, who started telling their tale in 1940. Instead, it was the protagonists of this book who needed a scientific approach to get out of this world, which allowed its creators to launch a tradition in Fantasy that most mistakenly believe began with Terry Pratchett – one of humour, irreverence and literary parody.

Shea, Bayard and Chalmers are clinical psychologists who devise a methodology based on symbolic logic that will allow them to project themselves into other worlds that might only have existed in literature. The trio's first experiment goes awry, Shea being transported to the realm of the Norse myths instead of his intended ancient Ireland. Unfortunately, Ragnarok is looming and Shea's twentieth-century knowledge is of little value in the twilight of the gods. Eventually escaping and rejoining his companions, they then venture into an Elizabethan era that owes much to Spenser, successfully applying their logic to the magic that is abroad in this alternate England's green and enchanted land. Further adventures in the venues of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Finland's epic *The Kalevala* and Celtic Eire follow, filled with silly jokes and absurd situations that satirise the sacred cows of mythology in a manner which might have inspired *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

Both authors also produced serious work in the years before Tolkien's reign – notably Pratt's ***The Well of the Unicorn***, which influenced ›› Moorcock, while De Camp completed the ***Conan*** stories left unfinished by ›› Howard, preserving his legacy alongside Lin Carter (creator of Thongor of Lemuria, Conan's notable successor). Their collective contribution to genre fantasy is unknown to the majority of younger readers, who owe De Camp and Pratt much for keeping the spirit of Genre Fantasy alive in its pulp infancy.

Read on

Land of Unreason

Lin Carter, ***Kesrick***; Robert A. Heinlein, ***Glory Road***; Tom Holt, ***Expecting Someone Taller***; Larry Niven, ***The Magic Goes Away***

GORDON R. DICKSON (1923–2001) CANADA/USA

THE DRAGON AND THE GEORGE (1976)

Series: The Dragon Knight

Jim Eckert is a graduate student with a girlfriend named Angie, who is a laboratory assistant to a mad professor who is working on an astral projection machine. One day, when Jim visits the lab to meet with his lady love, he is just in time to see her disappearing into the ether as a result of an experiment in astral projection gone drastically wrong. Bravely, Jim takes his place in the machine and follows her into the

unknown. Before long he is in the same world as Angie but he has a problem. While Angie has remained human, he has become a dragon named Gorbash. In this strange world where Jim is now Gorbash, dragons refer to human beings as 'Georges' (after the dragon-slaying saint of that name) and they are more interested in eating them than rescuing them. Jim/Gorbash has to attempt to free Angie from the Dark Powers who have her in their grasp while struggling to cope with the new demands made of him now he is a dragon in a very different reality to the one he has previously known.

Throughout the book, Dickson, a very prolific SF and Fantasy author, makes full use of the opportunities for fun and games offered to him by his basic premise. He returned to the world of *The Dragon and the George* a decade and a half after the original was published and eventually produced eight more titles in the series. All are enjoyable and worth reading but none has quite the tongue-in-cheek brio and entertainment value of the first.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Dragon Knight*; *The Dragon on the Border*; *The Dragon at War*; *The Dragon, the Earl and the Troll*; *The Dragon and the Djinn*; *The Dragon and the Gnarly King*; *The Dragon in Lyonesse*; *The Dragon and the Fair Maid of Kent*

Read on

Piers Anthony, *A Spell for Chameleon* (first of the humorous and bestselling ***Xanth*** series); E.E. Knight, *Dragon Champion*; Christopher Stasheff, *Her Majesty's Wizard*

STEPHEN DONALDSON (b. 1947) USA

LORD FOUL'S BANE (1977)

Series: The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever

Thomas Covenant is a bestselling writer whose life is destroyed when he is diagnosed as suffering from leprosy. Isolated by his disease and shunned by those who once loved him, he is involved in a car accident. He wakes to find himself in The Land, a place where he is confronted by a being named Lord Foul the Despiser who tells him that the realm they inhabit is doomed to destruction. Covenant has lost fingers on his right hand to his disease and, as a consequence, he is hailed by others he meets as the reincarnation of Berek Halfhand, a legendary hero who saved the Land from Lord Foul long in the past. The assumption is that he will do so again. Covenant, however, is unconvinced. Unlike most heroes of fantasy who accept their quests and their destinies with relish, he refuses to believe in the reality of the world to which he has been transported. Certain that he is suffering from delusions as a consequence of his crash, he is unwilling to accept his status as saviour of The Land and is only a reluctant participant in the events that unfold around him.

Stephen Donaldson grew up in India where his father was a medical missionary treating lepers and it was his experiences there that shaped the creation of Thomas Covenant. For a time in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Donaldson's fiction stood at the head of fantasy bestseller lists and seemed to point the way forward for the genre. It has lost some of its status as the decades have passed and his more recent works have been less well received than the earlier books but the original ***Chronicles*** remain amongst the most compelling works in the history of

American fantasy and their deeply ambivalent hero one of its most original characters.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Illearth War*; *The Power That Preserves* (the other two volumes in ***The First Chronicles of Thomas Covenant***); *The Wounded Land*; *The One Tree*; *White Gold Wielder* (***The Second Chronicles of Thomas Covenant***); *The Runes of the Earth*; *Fatal Revenant* (the first two volumes in the as-yet-uncompleted ***Last Chronicles of Thomas Covenant***)

Read on
Mordant's Need (*The Mirror of her Dreams*; *A Man Rides Through*) R. Scott Bakker, *The Darkness That Comes Before*; Terry Goodkind, *Wizard's First Rule*; Brandon Sanderson, *Elantris*

LORD DUNSANY (1878–1957)

THE KING OF ELFLAND'S DAUGHTER (1924)

Born into one of the most notable families in Irish history, Edward Plunkett, who became the eighteenth Baron Dunsany at the age of twenty-one, began to publish his fantasy stories during the Edwardian era and went on to produce a substantial body of work that ranged from successful stage plays to otherworldly masterpieces like *The King of Elfland's Daughter*.

'We would be ruled by a magic lord,' say the men of the parliament of Erl in the first chapter of this strange and evocative novel and their king, in responding to their wishes and sending his son Alveric to woo the eponymous heroine Lizarel, unleashes a train of events which no-one can predict. 'Beyond the fields we know', in the memorable phrase Dunsany uses, lie the wonders and splendours of Elfland and Alveric, ambivalent hero of an ambivalent novel, pays the price that any mortal must when he passes from one world into another and back. Lizarel returns with him to the fields we know but she yearns for what she has lost. When nostalgia becomes too much for her and she leaves for her homeland, her husband and the son she has given him must live with the loss as best they may.

As ›› Neil Gaiman has written, this is a book about magic, 'about the perils of inviting magic into your life' and 'about the magic that can be found in the mundane world'. Readers are left to wonder and to decide for themselves whether or not the men of Erl were right to long for the rule of a magic lord. One of the undoubted greats of fantasy literature, Dunsany's influence has been acknowledged by many contemporary authors and *The King of Elfland's Daughter* is his finest and most original novel.

Read on

Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley; *The Charwoman's Shadow* (two novels set in a fantasy version of Golden Age Spain)
›› Neil Gaiman, *Stardust*; ›› H.P. Lovecraft, *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*; James Thurber, *The 13 Clocks*

DAVID EDDINGS (1931–2009) USA

PAWN OF PROPHECY (1982)

Series: The Belgariad

Born and brought up in the Pacific Northwest, Eddings worked in a variety of careers before becoming a published author in his forties. His fantasy fiction began to appear in the early 1980s and he produced a number of stand-alone novels and several epic sequences set in worlds where magic and heroic destiny play central roles in the plot.

Pawn of Prophecy begins by introducing to a young orphan boy named Garion who is growing up on a farm in the land of Sendaria under the care of his Aunt Pol. From time to time the farm is visited by an old storyteller who engages Garion's imagination with his descriptions of an evil god named Torak, of the legendary Orb of Aldur and of prophecies which tell of a king destined to defeat Torak and restore the world to a golden age. There are few prizes for readers who guess that Aunt Pol and the storyteller are not all they seem and that Garion himself is fated to do more than spend his days as a farm labourer.

This is essentially formulaic High Fantasy and Eddings's stories are largely conventional excursions into the kind of territory usually covered in such fiction. Most of his narratives are structured around a quest in which his characters learn more about themselves as they journey through unfamiliar and dangerous landscapes, struggling to achieve the tasks that destiny has imposed upon them. However, he gives the old clichés fresh vigour with his energetic and often very funny storytelling. He was not the most innovative of Fantasy writers to have emerged in the last thirty years but he was one of the most consistently entertaining.

✍ **Sequels:** *Queen of Sorcery*; *Magician's Gambit*; *Castle of Wizardry*; *Enchanters' End Game*

Read on

Guardians of the West (the first in ***The Malloreon*** sequence that follows ***The Belgariad***); *Domes of Fire* (the first in ***The Tamuli*** sequence)

Lloyd Alexander, *The Book of Three*; Ian Irvine, *A Shadow on the Glass*; Fred Saberhagen, *The First Book of Swords*

E.R. EDDISON (1882–1945) UK

THE WORM OUROBOROS (1922)

High-ranking British civil servants are not usually noted for their fantastical imaginations but Eric Rücker Eddison, author of some of the most unusual fantasy novels ever published by an English author, was a senior figure at the Board of Trade in the 1920s and 1930s. All the time he was wandering along the corridors of power in the civil service, Eddison was also entering the imaginary worlds which he brought to life in his fiction. The stories which would eventually become *The Worm Ouroboros* originated in childhood scribblings but he developed them throughout later decades until they were first published when their author was forty years old. The deeds recounted in the book supposedly take place on Mercury but Eddison is not, in any sense, an

SF writer because of his use of magic, although his work is arguably an impure kind of Planetary Romance.

The story focuses on the protracted war between the lords of Demonland and the king of Witchland. Early in the book, Lord Goldry Bluszco is challenged to a wrestling match by King Gorice XI, one on which the fate of their respective lands will hang. Goldry wins and kills his opponent but the new king, Gorice XII, is a man with access to powerful magic. His sorcery imprisons Goldry on a dizzying mountain top and the other lords must do bloody battle to rescue their comrade and defeat the powers the king has unleashed. A complex combination of medieval romance, Homeric epic and Norse saga, written in lushly archaic prose and studded with vivid and memorable set-pieces, ***The Worm Ouroboros*** is a book like few others. Read it and discover why no less a critic than C.S. Lewis once wrote that, 'Eddison's heroic romances are works, first and foremost, of art'.

Read on

The Zimiamvian Trilogy (*Mistress of Mistresses*; *A Fish Dinner in Memison*; *The Mezentian Gate*)

James Branch Cabell, ***Figures of Earth***; ›› Lord Dunsany, ***The Sword of Welleran and Other Stories***; ***Njal's Saga*** (one of the finest of the Norse epics on which Eddison drew for his imagined worlds)

STEVEN ERIKSON (b. 1959) CANADA

GARDENS OF THE MOON (1999)

Series: The Malazan Books of the Fallen

An iron weathervane screeches complaint against a savage wind. A noble youth gazes down upon a rioting citadel. A veteran soldier's advice to the boy, laden with *weltschmerz*, goes unheeded. Years pass. A queen rises in the empire, demanding new conquests. The foot-soldiers fight on, mired to their knees in gore. Amongst them are swordsmen, sorcerers and a few survivors. Sergeant Whiskeyjack is one of the latter – demoted, dispirited and accompanied by magi who, like himself, are really nothing but grunts. And then there is the boy, grown to manhood, his dreams of heroism turned to bitter ashes in his maw. Welcome to the pitiless Malazan Empire, where the army are more worried about the decisions of their sovereign than whatever the enemy can throw at them.

Malazan is the Vietnam War of contemporary Genre Fantasy, truly panoramic in scope, complex and illustrative of the truism that war is hell, except that as the supernatural is abroad, references to the fiery place are unpleasantly literal. *Gardens of the Moon* plunges the reader into the fray without preamble, while its sequels run parallel, intersecting and reflecting each other in a kaleidoscopic maelstrom of action. Erikson seasons his saga with gratifyingly naturalistic dialogue, characters whose chagrin we can identify with immediately and a matter-of-fact approach to sorcery allied with spine-jolting plot revelations.

An anthropologist and archaeologist, Erikson devised the Malazan Empire with Ian Cameron Esslemont, initially intending to use it as a

role-playing game venue. Instead, the duo put their creation to better use, the martial desolation of Erikson's vision displaying a thrilling realism which has made him, alongside ›› George R.R. Martin, one of the most feted fantasy writers of the last decade.

✍ **Sequels:** *Deadhouse Gates*; *Memories of Ice*; *House of Chains*; *Midnight Tides*; *The Bonehunters*; *Reaper's Gale*; *Toll the Hounds*; *Dust of Dreams*

Read on

Other ***Malazan*** titles include *The Lees of Laughter's End* and *Bauchelain and Korbal Broach* and Ian Cameron Esslemont's *Night of Knives* and *Return of the Crimson Guard*

Joe Abercrombie, *The Blade Itself*; R. Scott Bakker, *The Darkness That Comes Before*; Glen Cook, *The Black Company*

PHILIP JOSE FARMER (1918–2009) USA

A FEAST UNKNOWN (1969)

If ever a Fantasy novel ought to bear the legend 'ADULTS ONLY' on its jacket, it should be *A Feast Unknown*. Farmer's greatest and most extreme novel was issued by Essex House, a short-lived imprint that published only erotic fiction, much of it Fantastic in nature. But while *A Feast Unknown* is undeniably pornographic, it is also far more than a bit of hackwork to be read with one hand.

The story is narrated by James Cloamby, Lord Grandrith, mutant superman of noble English lineage born in Africa, raised by a colony of surviving Australopithecine protohumans. Grandrith is a member of a secret society overseen by The Nine, a cadre of evil immortals who control the secret of a mysterious longevity potion. But Grandrith rebels, suspicious of his masters' intentions, finding himself up against Doc Caliban, a similarly superb physical specimen, who has been misled to believe that Grandrith supports The Nine. A clash of the titans is inevitable, but when the two overmen finally battle, they both discover a similar affliction – neither of them is capable of orgasm except while inflicting intense cruelty upon their chosen victims. But what is to be expected of these outrageous equivalents of Tarzan and Doc Savage, half-brothers whose father was none other than Jack the Ripper?

Farmer's *A Feast Unknown* satirises and reveals the libidinous and violent emotions implicit in the Freudian metaphors employed by many SF and Fantasy writers. Both a critique and a Sadean celebration of the powerful impulses that Fantastic fiction stirs within us, this groundbreaking and shocking book is one of the most unforgettable reads in the Fantasy canon. Tautly written, admirably well-plotted, fearlessly imaginative and roaring with vivid life, this is Farmer at his apotheosis. Although this celebrated SF author never produced a book anywhere near as potent again, he wrote several other masterpieces and numerous examples of highest-calibre adventure fiction confirming his status as one of the greatest genre authors ever. Particularly adept at producing outrageous pastiches of popular characters created by other writers, Farmer's take on Tarzan is quintessentially unmissable.

✍ **Sequels:** *Lord of the Trees*; *Keepers of the Secrets* (aka *The Mad Goblin*)

Read on

Lord Tyger; *Time's Last Gift*; *Hadon of Ancient Opar*; *Flight To Opar*

READONATHEME: NOBLE SAVAGES & EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

Pulp heroes and postmodern re-imaginings of classic Fantastic adventurers

Peter Ackroyd, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*
Marcel Allain & Pierre Souvestre, *Fantomas*
Eric Brown, *The Extraordinary Voyage of Jules Verne*
Michael Chabon, *The Final Solution*
August Derleth, *The Exploits of Solar Pons*
›› Philip Jose Farmer, *Tarzan Alive: The Definitive Biography of Lord Greystoke*; *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life*
Anthony Skene, *Zenith the Albino*
Iain Sinclair, *White Chappell Scarlet Tracings*
John Shirley, *Dracula in Love*

RAYMOND E. FEIST (b. 1945) USA

MAGICIAN (1982)

Series: *The Riftwar Saga*

Before *Magician* appeared, publishing novels in the larger, trade paperback format as a mid-price alternative to an expensive hardcover, some nine to twelve months before a standard mass-market edition was issued, had proved to be a non-starter. But Feist's first novel was so compelling that Fantasy readers were too eager to wait for a regular paperback; *Silverthorn*, sequel to *Magician*, made publishing history in Britain by establishing the trade paperback as a bestselling format. Soon afterwards, numerous Fantasy authors found that their new book was issued in boards for collectors and trade paperback for fans on a tight budget who couldn't wait any longer.

Aside from the immediate critical reception accorded to *Magician*, the secret of Feist's groundbreaking success lay in his offering the reader not one secondary Fantasy world, but two. Whereas numerous other writers had used our Earth and another, magical realm, Feist gave us Midkemia, a medieval-flavoured land of the Tolkienesque variety, and Kelewan, an oriental world reminiscent of feudal Japan. These two worlds intersect via rifts in space–time, creating the major conflicts of the book and providing suitably exciting settings for the quests of friends Pug and Tomas, who both find their respective destinies as wizard and warrior. Pug is a particularly endearing character and admirers of Frodo Baggins will instantly identify with him.

Magician was probably the most important traditional S&S novel of the 1980s, a time when there was a massive flowering of popular talent

in the genre. Despite stiff competition from the likes of ›› Eddings and ›› Brooks, Feist reigned supreme in those golden days of Genre Fantasy publishing. Prior to his success as an author, Feist had designed role-playing games, a skill that served him well in constructing the imperious *Riftwar Saga*. He has continued to produce addictive bestsellers ever since and his stature as a leader of the field remains undiminished.

✍ **Sequels:** *Silverthorn*; *A Darkness at Sethanon*; *A Prince of the Blood*; *The King's Buccaneer*

🗐 **Prequels:** ***The Serpentwar Saga*** (*Shadow of a Dark Queen*; *Rise of a Merchant Prince*; *Rage of a Demon King*; *Shards of a Broken Crown*)

Read on

Elizabeth Haydon, *Rhapsody: Child of Blood*; Sean Russell, *The One Kingdom*; Janny Wurts, *Curse of the Mistwraith*

CHARLES G. FINNEY (1905–84) USA

THE CIRCUS OF DR LAO (1935)

A newspaperman who worked for most of his life in Arizona, Charles G. Finney published a handful of novels of which *The Circus of Dr Lao* was the first. The book is set in Abalone, Arizona, an archetypal American small town where little happens and excitements are few and far between. People are therefore thrilled when an advertisement appears in the local paper announcing the imminent arrival of a circus. However, the circus that the enigmatic and elderly Chinese gentleman who calls himself Dr Lao brings to Abalone is unlike any other the townsfolk have seen. In place of the lions and tigers and elephants of ordinary circuses, Lao has beasts of myth and legend. A millennia-old satyr, a Medusa with snakes instead of hair, a sphinx, a chimera – all these and more are members of his travelling menagerie. The stage is set for a series of encounters between the people of Abalone and the fantastic creatures from the circus. A proofreader on the local newspaper and a sea serpent have a strange meeting of minds. An ageing widow has a conversation with the ancient soothsayer Apollonius of Tyana in which, although he reveals the emptiness of her life and her dreams of love, she blithely refuses to acknowledge his predictions. Townsfolk gaze open-mouthed at a living mermaid.

The Circus of Dr Lao is a short novel but it packs a lot into fewer than 150 pages. In the course of it, Finney moves elegantly from black humour to philosophical speculation, from the kind of textual playfulness that today gets labelled 'postmodernism' to satirical mockery of American provincialism. It is a fantasy like few others from

its era and it leaves readers regretting both that it is no longer and that its author wrote so few other works of fiction.

Film version: *Seven Faces of Dr Lao* (1964)

Read on
The Unholy City
›› Ray Bradbury, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*; ›› Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus*; Will Elliot, *The Pilo Family Circus*

CORNELIA FUNKE (b. 1958) GERMANY

INKHEART (2003)

'What if every time you read aloud, the story came to life?' This is a question which the many fans of Cornelia Funke's novel *Inkheart* can already answer. The story focuses on Mo Folchart, a bookbinder who can bring characters from fiction into the real world, and his twelve-year-old daughter, Meggie who is drawn into the adventures her father's peculiar talent initiates. Meggie only learns of Mo's ability when a strange man calling himself Dustfinger turns up on their doorstep and the truth about what happened many years earlier begins to emerge. Her father read aloud from a book named *Inkheart* and Dustfinger and other characters were released into our reality. At the same time, Meggie's mother was sucked into the world of the book. One of the

released characters is the wicked and murderous Capricorn who is intent on tracking down Mo and forcing him to do his will. Together with Dustfinger, Meggie and her father must flee the villainous Capricorn and find the author of *Inkheart*, the one man who may be able to help them.

Cornelia Funke was born in the north German town of Dorsten in 1958 and began her career in children's literature as an illustrator (many editions of the *Inkheart* trilogy include her own evocative illustrations) before making her mark in her native country with two series of books published in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Her fantasy fiction has only gained international attention in the last decade but she is already one of the most popular of all children's writers worldwide. She has often been dubbed 'the German J.K. Rowling' by lazy journalists looking for a way to categorise her but that glib description ignores the particular strengths of her imagination. In an age when the pleasures of competing media are ever-present, Funke celebrates the transformative powers of books and reading with an originality that is all her own.

Film version: *Inkheart* (2008)

Sequels: *Inkspell*; *Inkdeath*

Read on

The Thief Lord; *Dragon Rider*

Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story*; Reinhardt Jung, *Bambert's Book of Missing Stories*; Walter Moers, *The City of Dreaming Books*

NEIL GAIMAN (b. 1960) UK

NEVERWHERE (1996)

The hero of *Neverwhere* – or at least its central character – is an everyman named Richard Mayhew. When the novel opens, Mayhew has an ordinary job and leads an ordinary life but he is destined to travel in regions of London that most ordinary men never visit. He is fated to leave the world of London Above and plunge into the strange, parallel universe of London Below. En route to dinner with his fiancée and her plutocratic boss, Mayhew stumbles across an injured girl in the street. Despite his fiancée's pleas to leave the girl where she is, Mayhew takes upon himself the role of good Samaritan and, when the girl refuses medical treatment, he eventually looks after her in his flat. His act of charity is what propels him from London Above to London Below. The girl is named Door and she is a visitor from an alternative city beneath the streets. Through his involvement with her, Mayhew is dragged into a bizarre world. Names which are just names in London Above have a literal reality in London Below. The Angel, Islington is an angel called Islington; there are black friars in Blackfriars and Night's Bridge is a bridge surrounded by a scary darkness. The other London also contains a rich assortment of oddball and memorable characters, from the dandyish Marquis de Carabas to the sinister assassins, Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar, and Mayhew is forced into a dangerous quest through the world they inhabit.

In the years since he published *Neverwhere* (which began life as a TV series) Neil Gaiman has gone from strength to strength. With earlier triumphs in seminal modern comics like *Sandman* and his collaborations with ›› Terry Pratchett already behind him, he has continued to

show the versatile talent which has made him probably the wittiest and most inventive English fantasy writer of his generation.

Read on
Coraline; *American Gods*
Simon R. Green, *Something from the Nightside*; Michael de Larrabeiti, *The Borribles*; ›› China Miéville, *Un Lun Dun*

JOHN GARDNER (1933–82) USA

GRENDEL (1971)

The Old English poem ***Beowulf*** (probably written somewhere about the year 1000) is set in dark ages Scandinavia. It tells of how Heorot, the Mead Hall of King Hrothgar, is beset by a fiend named Grendel who, over a period of years, raids the wooden dwelling many times, murdering and devouring Hrothgar's people. Bearing his enchanted sword, Beowulf comes to Hrothgar's aid, destroying both Grendel and his nightmarish mother before returning to his native Sweden, where he later encounters a dragon whose treasure hoard has been ransacked. The poem is arguably the primary source of S&S and a key influence upon ›› Anderson and ›› Tolkien.

Several pointlessly unfaithful film versions of ***Beowulf*** have appeared recently. Far better is John Gardner's version, narrated by Grendel himself. A brief, lyrical, yet earthy novel of great literary sophistication,

the book presents us with a creature rather like Frankenstein's monster, a being malicious because he is miserable in his recognition of the meaninglessness of life. Yet while the stories and songs he hears from the humans of Heorot inspire him, Grendel sees them for what they are – mere lies, disguises that men use in vain attempts to hide from the true contingency of existence. In a memorable conversation with one of the finest dragons in fantasy fiction, the squamous beast reveals its materialist philosophy to the trollish Grendel. Holding forth on the illusion of free will and the reality of predestination (based on a vision of time as something that has already happened, but that we perceive as flowing like a river, something some physicists would support), the dragon's meditations encourage Grendel to reconsider his hypocrisy. He becomes an existentialist monster, concerned with being and nothingness and mayhem.

John Gardner was an academic and novelist whose work stands beside the greatest of post-war American fabulists like Thomas Pynchon and John Barth. But unlike them, his writing displays a light deftness and historical resonance that make *Grendel* a sterling work of high art, as much essential reading as *Beowulf* itself.

Read on

Anthony Burgess, *Any Old Iron*; Roger Lancelyn Green, *Myths of the Norsemen*; Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle and Steven Barnes, *The Legacy of Heorot*; Rosemary Sutcliff, *The Dragonslayer*; Henry Treece, *The Great Captains*

ALAN GARNER (b. 1934) UK

THE WEIRDSTONE OF BRISINGAMEN (1960)

'I didn't consciously set out to write for children,' Alan Garner once said in an interview, 'but somehow I connect with them.' Most of Garner's fiction has been published and marketed as if it was for children and children have often been his most enthusiastic and perceptive readers but the truth is that his novels can be read by anyone who responds to imaginative storytelling. Many of his books take legends and folktales of the past and rework them into contemporary stories. *The Owl Service*, for example, is a modern reinterpretation of the Welsh legend of Blodeuwedd, told in the collection of medieval tales known as the Mabinogion. The folklore of his native Cheshire has been a particularly rich source of material for Garner over the years. *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* draws upon the many legends that have attached themselves to Alderley Edge, a steep and wooded sandstone ridge in the Cheshire countryside, and adds into the mix themes and figures from Celtic and Norse mythology. The book tells of the adventures of Colin and Susan, two children who are sent to stay on a farm near the Edge and soon encounter some of the creatures which haunt the eerie landscape. While walking at dusk they are pursued by Svarts, menacing goblin-like beings, and are only rescued by the sudden appearance of a wizard. Through their meeting with the wizard Cadellin, they are plunged into his battle against the forces of darkness and sent on a quest to recover the eponymous Weirdstone, the focus of the magic he represents. Accompanied by two heroic dwarfs, the children track it down and are then pursued under the earth and across the Cheshire plain by the svarts and by even more nightmarish creatures before they

can return it to Cadellin. In what was his very first novel, Garner creates a vivid world of myth and magic which exists within and alongside the kind of familiar English landscape we all recognise.

✍ **Sequel:** *The Moon of Gomrath*

Read on
Elidor; *The Owl Service*
Joan Aiken, *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*; ›› Diana Wynne Jones, *Eight Days of Luke*; Pat O'Shea, *The Hounds of the Morrigan*; Philippa Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden*

JANE GASKELL (b. 1941) UK

THE SERPENT (1963)

Series: *Atlan*

Jane Gaskell's first novel, *Strange Evil*, was written and published when she was a teenager. The book still has many admirers, among them ›› China Miéville who described it in a 2002 article in *The Guardian* as 'a fraught fairyland full of sexuality' which contains 'the most extraordinary baddy in fiction'. *The Serpent* was published six years after *Strange Evil* and is the first of a sequence of novels set in a prehistoric South American continent inhabited by dinosaurs, humans, lizard-men and an exotic assortment of other creatures. This antediluvian

world is a brutal one, riven by warfare and killing. The heroine of ***The Serpent***, who tells her own story and whose memorable narrative voice gives the book much of its imaginative power, is a young woman named Cija. Cija has spent her life in isolation and has been raised to believe herself a goddess in a world where women rule and men no longer exist. At the age of 17, she is released from the tower in which she has been confined and despatched by her mother to join the warlord Zerd as a hostage to ensure the safe passage of his armies through potentially hostile territory. Cija has secret instructions from her mother to seduce and kill the half-reptilian and arrogantly masculine general but the task proves a difficult one. Meeting with him is only the start of a dangerous odyssey that sees her journeying through the weird and erotically charged world Jane Gaskell created towards an island Atlantis. A heady mixture of ›› Edgar Rice Burroughs-style pulp and proto-feminist reclamation of female sexuality, Cija's lurid adventures continued in several sequels. Since her heyday in the 1960s, Gaskell has published very little but her ***Atlan*** saga still stands as proof of the wild and unfettered imagination she possessed as a young woman.

✍ **Sequels:** *Atlan*; *The City*; *Some Summer Lands*

Prequel: *King's Daughter*

Read on

Strange Evil; *The Shiny Narrow Grin*

Jean M. Auel, *The Clan of the Cave Bear*; ›› Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar*; Janet E. Morris, *High Couch of Silistra*

DAVID GEMMELL (1948–2006) UK

LEGEND (1984)

Series: *Drenai*

The Drenai Empire is threatened by the invading armies of Ulric, barbarian king of the Nadir, and, as they converge on the mighty fortress of Dros Delnoch, only its legendary hero Druss can save it. Druss is ageing now but stories have long been told of his prowess as a warrior and he is prepared to take up his battleaxe once more to hold the fortress and save the empire.

Epic warfare and tumultuous swordsmanship have been at the heart of a certain style of fantasy writing for a long time but few have described them with such verve and energy as David Gemmell. ***Legend*** was begun at a time when he was facing a life-threatening illness. As he later acknowledged, the besieged fortress defended by the ageing warrior in the novel reflected his own feelings of being under assault from the disease. Rewritten and revised, the book was only published some years later, when Gemmell had recovered, and it became an immediate success with Fantasy fans. It was the first of a series of books set in the Drenai Empire. Some (*The First Chronicles of Druss the Legend*; *The Legend of Deathwalker*) filled in the backstory of the hero of the first book; others (*The King Beyond the Gate*) told of events a century or more after the heroics of *Legend*.

In the last few years of his life, Gemmell turned to the writing of historical fantasy, stories of ancient Troy which were rooted very firmly in the realities of the time as revealed in Greek texts and the discoveries of archaeology. They possessed all the virtues of vivid storytelling that his novels had shown from the beginning. The history that Gemmell told

in *Legend* and the rest of the Drenai books may not have existed outside his imagination but it was no less powerful for that.

✍ **Sequels:** *The King Beyond the Gate*; *Waylander*; *Quest for Lost Heroes*; *In the Realm of the Wolf*; *The First Chronicles of Druss the Legend*; *The Legend of Deathwalker*; *Winter Warriors*; *Hero in the Shadows*

Read on ›› Poul Anderson, *Conan the Rebel*; Adrian Tchaikovsky, *Empire in Black and Gold*

KENNETH GRAHAME (1859–1932) UK

THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS (1908)

To all outward appearances Kenneth Grahame was a conventional City man who worked for many years in a senior position at the Bank of England. Yet there was a hidden side to him that his colleagues at the Bank rarely, if ever, saw. He was also a man possessed of a vivid and romantic imagination. In the 1890s, he was a contributor to *The Yellow Book*, house magazine of the most daring artists and writers of the period, and was the author of two books (*The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*) which demonstrate a remarkable empathy with the hopes and interests of young children.

In 1908, the year he retired from the Bank, Grahame published *The Wind in the Willows*, a book which began as a series of stories he told his young son and which rapidly established itself as a classic. *The Wind in the Willows* is the story of Ratty and his friend Mole and their assorted adventures on their beloved riverbank. Together they mess about in boats, venture into the Wild Wood, have a mystical encounter with the 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn' and, together with Mr Badger, are witnesses to the outrageous behaviour of the obstreperous Toad of Toad Hall.

In one sense, Grahame's characters are thoroughly anthropomorphised. They dress, talk and behave like members of the Edwardian professional and middle classes. Toad even seems like a louche upper-crust lounger from the era. And yet somehow Grahame never loses sight of the fact that they are animals. They also behave like the familiar British creatures on which they are modelled and the countryside in which they live is beautifully and vividly evoked. The result is a book that combines fantasy and the everyday to create a very special magic which continues to beguile both children and adults a century after it was written.

Film version: *The Wind in the Willows* (1996)

Read on

Dream Days (especially the short story, 'The Reluctant Dragon')
William Horwood, *The Willows in Winter* (the first of a number of sequels to *The Wind in the Willows*); Jan Needle, *Wild Wood* (the story Grahame tells re-told from the point of view of the despised stoats and weasels)

READONATHEME: ANTHROPOMORPHIC ADVENTURES

Richard M. Ford, *Quest for the Faradawn*
Steve Gerber et al, *The Howard the Duck Omnibus*
Brian Jacques, *Redwall*
Garry Kilworth, *Hunter's Moon*
Gabriel King, *The Wild Road*
Rudyard Kipling, *Just So Stories*
A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*
Robert O'Brien, *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*
George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
Walter Wangerin, *The Book of the Dun Cow*

KEN GRIMWOOD (1944–2003) USA

REPLAY (1987)

'Jeff Winston was on the phone with his wife when he died.' The first line of Ken Grimwood's offbeat novel might seem more appropriate to an ending than a beginning but it heralds the start of a remarkable journey. Forty-three years old and dissatisfied with his life, Winston dies of a sudden heart attack but he awakes to find himself a teenager. Propelled back in time to the early 1960s, he is a college student once again but

this time he has all the knowledge he gathered in the twenty-five years between graduation and his apparent death. Armed with this, he is able to reshape his life entirely. Using his privileged information about the future, he starts by betting on the Kentucky Derby, moves on to stock market speculation and eventually becomes one of America's richest men. And then he dies again. And awakes again. Winston is caught in a sequence of replays of his own life, each one holding the potential to work out differently from the others. During one of them he makes contact with a woman, Pamela Phillips, who is experiencing the same cycle of death and reawakening. They work out how to stay together replay after replay but they also realise that each time they return they come back closer and closer to the moment of their deaths. Their replayed lives have an end in sight just as ordinary lives do. How do they adapt themselves to their extraordinary circumstances and how do they give meaning to the time they have been so strangely given?

Ken Grimwood was a Californian novelist who published several novels which explored concepts of life, death and immortality but none of the others had the critical and commercial success of ***Replay*** which takes a simple, 'what if?' idea and works out its consequences with enormous ingenuity, insight and poignancy.

Read on

Elise

Avram Davidson & Ward Moore, ***Joyleg***; Jack Finney, ***Time and Again***; Richard Matheson, ***What Dreams May Come***

H. RIDER HAGGARD (1856–1925) UK

SHE (1887)

In Rider Haggard's fiction, Africa is a continent of fantasy as much as reality. In *King Solomon's Mines*, his best-known book, the white hunter Allan Quatermain leads a safari in search of a fabulous lost treasure. Haggard draws on his own knowledge of South Africa, where he spent time as a colonial administrator, to describe the landscape Quatermain travels and the people he meets but many of the most memorable elements of the story owe little to anything beyond the power of the author's romantic imagination. The same is even more true of *She*. The novel tells the story, in his own words, of Horace Holly, a Cambridge academic who sets off on a journey to Africa with his ward Leo Vincey. They are following the enigmatic message on an ancient potsherd which suggests that Leo is the descendant of an ancient priest of Isis named Kallikrates and that some great secret has lain hidden in the heart of Africa for millennia awaiting anyone bold enough to go in search of it. Horace and Leo are shipwrecked on the coast of East Africa and make their way inland. They are captured by tribesmen and taken before Ayesha or She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed, a mysterious white queen who rules the region. She is fabulously beautiful and claims to be more than two thousand years old. She offers the kind of near-immortality she herself possesses to Leo, whom she recognises as the reincarnation of Kallikrates, the lover she murdered many centuries in the past, but events conspire to thwart her desires.

She is very much a product of late Victorian culture but it also has a power which transcends the time in which it was written. Carl Gustav Jung, who was one of the book's admirers, believed that Haggard had, in

the character of She, brilliantly embodied the female principle the psychologist called the 'anima'. Whether or not Jung was correct, Ayesha is undoubtedly one of the most unforgettable women in fantasy literature.

Film version: *She* (1965)

Sequels: *Ayesha: The Return of She*; *She and Allan* (Haggard's two great creations, Ayesha and Allan Quatermain, meet)

Read on
The People of the Mist
Pierre Benoit, *The Queen of Atlantis*

READONATHEME: LOST LANDS, LOST RACES

Lin Carter, *Journey to the Underground World*
Stanton A. Coblentz, *When the Birds Fly South*
Basil Copper, *The Great White Space*
›› Philip Jose Farmer & J.H. Rosny-Aine, *Ironcastle*
James De Mille, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*
Stephen Hunt, *The Kingdom Beyond the Waves*
Henry Kuttner, *Valley of the Flame*
›› A. Merritt, *The Moon Pool*

Edward Myers, *The Mountain Made of Light*
Joseph O'Neill, *Land Under England*
Dennis Wheatley, *The Man Who Missed the War*

M. JOHN HARRISON **(b. 1945)** UK

THE PASTEL CITY (1971)

Series: *Viriconium*

Stories using the 'Dying Earth' motif of the distant future, when civilisation is in decline and has passed through a technological age into a somnolent era in which human culture is a hybrid of the scientific and magical, are a common ground for Fantasy authors with a literary bent. Many commentators agree that it is M. John Harrison who puts such material to its finest and most radical use.

The Pastel City is the first of Harrison's flavoursome ***Viriconium*** sequence, four volumes of novels and stories set in a future England of crumbling technology, decadent characters, and sulky swordplay. Viriconium's equivalent of ›› Moorcock's Elric is tegeus-Cromis, an unwilling, indolent blade-wielder who believes his real talent is for composing verse rather than cleaving Northern invaders in twain. When the dominion of Queen Jane is threatened by a usurper proceeded by an army of robotic reavers, Viriconium seems set to fall unless Cromis can be roused by the urgency of his former companions in arms. It is

very late in the day indeed when, heaving an almost audible sigh of exasperation, Cromis finally quits his seaside tower of solitude to join the final battle for his city's soul.

Harrison's work has more texture than any other Fantasy/SF author of his generation, making him closer to ›› Peake than ›› Tolkien. Massively influential over other writers but still a cult amongst more cosmopolitan genre readers, Harrison's aim in writing the ***Viriconium*** series seems to be to ask us why we are reading 'escapist' fiction at all, a revelation that becomes clear in the revised version of his story 'A Young Man's Journey To Viriconium', (which is retitled 'A Young Man's Journey To London' in the collection *Things That Never Happen*). Yet the more one reads his work, Harrison's questioning of the line between the mundane and the Fantastic remains ambiguous, another example of his unquestionable genius.

✍ **Sequels:** *A Storm of Wings*; *In Viriconium*; *Viriconium Nights* (Omnibus Edition: *Viriconium*)

Read on

The Course of the Heart

›› Philip Jose Farmer, *Dark is the Sun*; Arthur Machen, *The Great God Pan*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *An Alien Heat*; Brian Stableford, *Firefly*

LIAN HEARN (b. 1942) UK/AUSTRALIA

ACROSS THE NIGHTINGALE FLOOR (2002)

Series: *Tales of the Otori*

A classic example of an overnight success that took over a decade, Lian Hearn produced numerous children's books between 1986 and 2002 under her own name (Gillian Rubenstein) before hitting the big time with both juveniles and adults via her quietly gripping novels set in feudal Japan. Born in England but spending some of her childhood in Nigeria, Hearn has been resident in Australia since 1973. She made a lengthy study of Japanese culture before beginning work on her bestselling trilogy.

In *Across the Nightingale Floor*, we are introduced to Takeo, a youth who dwells among The Hidden, members of a mystical cult who are pariahs. After his fellow villagers are slaughtered, Takeo is taken under the wing of Shigeru, an upcoming member of the Otori Clan, a cadre of warriors adept in the combative arts. Shigeru coaches Takeo, imparting the wisdom and practises of the Otori, but the former's growing capability challenges the power bases of his uncles who head the clan. Shigeru is sent on a dangerous mission by his uncles and Takeo is kidnapped by The Tribe, an arcane society of magicians who curate the craft of sorcery, simultaneously concealing it and keeping its flame alive. Takeo will find his loyalties torn between his respect for Shigeru and his kinship with The Tribe, but the ninja skill he has learned from the Otori, combined with the superhuman abilities he has inherited from his deceased father, a member of The Tribe, will dictate his divided and troubled destiny. When Takeo stalks the creaking boards of the nightingale floor, designed to betray the arrival of any silent intruder, he

will stand revealed as an assassin – but will his paranormal skill enable him to prevent the wood from singing out his presence?

Like all great oriental epics, the ***Otori*** tales are a shimmering blend of quiet delicacy and ruthless action. Millions have thrilled to their special quality, which set a new standard for young adult fantasy.

✍ **Sequels:** *Grass for his Pillow*; *Brilliance of the Moon*; *The Harsh Cry of the Heron*

Prequel: *Heaven's Net Is Wide*

Read on

Barry Hughart, *Bridge of Birds*; S.P. Somtow, *Moon Dance*; ›› Geoff Ryman, *The Unconquered Country*

JAMES HILTON (1900–54) UK

LOST HORIZON (1933)

Born in Lancashire and educated at Cambridge, James Hilton published his first novel when he was still an undergraduate and went on to write more than twenty other works of fiction. He may not be an instantly familiar name today but two of his creations continue to be well-known and can even be said to have entered the language. Any elderly schoolmaster could be described as a Mr Chips, after the character in

Hilton's short novel ***Goodbye, Mr Chips***, while any earthly paradise (or Chinese restaurant) can be called Shangri-La, the name of the Tibetan lamasery in his ***Lost Horizon***, a place where death and ageing have been overcome.

The novel opens in Germany where a group of Englishmen is discussing an old acquaintance, Hugh Conway, a diplomat who has gone missing during an uprising in an Asian city Hilton calls Baskul. Later in the evening one of the Englishmen reveals to the narrator that he came across Conway after his disappearance and, before he vanished once again, the diplomat told him his story. Together with three companions, he was attempting to fly out of Baskul when the plane was hijacked by a mysterious pilot who flew them over unknown mountain ranges in Tibet. After a forced landing amidst the Tibetan peaks, they took shelter at Shangri-La. While enjoying the hospitality of the lamasery, Conway met its High Lama and received astonishing evidence that his host was more than two centuries old. Invited to stay, to enjoy his tranquil exile from the world and eventually to succeed the High Lama, the Englishman prepared to do so but was forced to abandon the idea and return to civilisation by the actions of one of his companions. The narrator and the book's readers are left to assume that Conway has attempted to make his way back to Shangri-la to fulfil his destiny as the new High Lama.

Film version: *Lost Horizon* (1937)

Read on

Hermann Hesse, ***Journey to the East***; W.H. Hudson, ***Green Mansions***; ›› Michael Moorcock, ***The Warlord of the Air***; John Steinbeck, ***The Pearl***

RUSSELL HOBAN (b. 1925) USA

KLEINZEIT (1974)

Originally a writer and illustrator of children's books, Russell Hoban wrote his first work for adults in 1973 and, in the thirty-five years since then, he has published just over a dozen other idiosyncratic and highly imaginative novels. His best-known book is probably ***Riddley Walker***, a novel set in an England many hundreds of years after a nuclear holocaust and told in a strange, fractured English that mirrors the broken society in which it takes place. If ***Riddley Walker*** needed to be placed in any genre, it would have to be described as SF. Similarly, ***Kleinzeit*** can be described as Fantasy. However, one of the delights of Hoban's writing is that it evades easy categorisation and ***Kleinzeit*** is a short book that nonetheless defies any reader to précis it or slot it into a convenient pigeonhole.

The hero of the novel, the eponymous Kleinzeit, is an advertising copywriter suffering from a mysterious ailment (something is wrong, we are told, with his hypotenuse) who is sent to Hospital. Hospital is not merely a building where doctors and nurses tend patients but a brooding presence which jeers and taunts Kleinzeit and invades his dreams. His only hope lies with Sister, the beautiful night nurse with whom he falls in love and eventually embarks on an affair. Meanwhile, when he decamps from Hospital, he is haunted by a bizarre red-bearded busker who drops sheets of yellow paper wherever he goes. Throughout the book Kleinzeit is confronted by abstract concepts or inanimate objects which prove to be not nearly so abstract or inanimate that they can't engage him in dialogue and he finds himself drawn in to strange echoes of ancient myths, particularly that of Orpheus and

Eurydice. Funny, offbeat and fully deserving of that over-used adjective 'surreal'. ***Kleinzeit*** proves conclusively that Hoban, as one critic has said, possesses 'a maverick voice like no other'.

Read on

The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz; *The Medusa Frequency*
Witold Gombrowicz, *Furdydurke*; Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*; Salman Rushdie, *Grimus*

ROBERT HOLDSTOCK (b. 1948) UK

MYTHAGO WOOD (1984)

1947: when Stephen Huxley returns to his family home on the outskirts of Ryhope Wood, he finds that his elder brother Christian has succumbed to their deceased father's obsession. An intense and distant man, George Huxley spent much of the boys' childhood exploring the dense woodlands, only returning to scribble a cryptic journal that references ley lines, split-brain psychology and old English mythology. Initially baffled by his brother's behaviour, Stephen studies his father's notes before Christian confirms that Ryhope Wood is more than just an unspoilt tract of country. The archaic forest is a space–time vortex into the very matter of ancient Britain, inhabited by the mythic archetypes of folklore, beings whose natures alter with the changes in the legends that have evolved in the retellings of millennia. But it is the

minds of the Huxleys themselves that summon the Myth-Image or 'Mythago' entities out of the collective unconscious into physical reality.

Often described as the ultimate Celtic fantasy, this WFA-winning book quickly became one of the canon of works beloved of pagans, folklorists and historians. Unburdened by fluffy clichés, *Mythago Wood* is as sinewy and powerful as the heroic and frightening avatars of Britain that stalk its pages. Like something unidentifiable caught momentarily in the corner of an eye in a damp, lonesome cluster of trees, this stunning book unsettles, compels and enlivens anyone who feels they have a spiritual connection to the shadowy nature of the British countryside.

Despite his degree in tropical medicine, Robert Holdstock's writings have always shown more interest in anthropology and psychology. His early experiments with SF novels, pseudonymous S&S and occult quest yarns revealed these tendencies but, with *Mythago Wood*, Holdstock claimed his place beside such seminal UK figures as ›› Tolkien and ›› Garner. He is now rightly regarded as one of the most important literary Fantasy writers ever.

✍ **Sequels:** *Lavondyss*; *The Bone Forest*; *The Hollowing* (aka *Cathedral*); *Merlin's Wood*; *Gate of Ivory* (aka *Gate of Ivory, Gate of Horn*)

Read on

Celtika

Charles De Lint, *Greenmantle*; Garry Kilworth, *Spiral Winds*; ›› Keith Roberts, *Grainne*; ›› Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Threshold*

ROBERT E. HOWARD (1906–36) USA

THE HOUR OF THE DRAGON (aka CONAN THE CONQUEROR) (1935)

Circa 10,000 BC: Atlantis has sunk and the great flood lies in the future. The landmass of what will be known as Europe and Asia Minor is greater than in recorded history. This is the Hyborian Age, a time of chaos, when empires are rising, mercenaries ply their bloodthirsty trade, corsairs haunt the seas and magi muttering incantations conjure up infernal monstrosities.

From the bleak Northern province of Cimmeria comes Conan, an imposing barbarian of mighty stature, gallows countenance and baleful mirth. After years of plundering, slaying and wenching, Conan eventually reaches his apotheosis when he is crowned King of Aquilonia. But four conspirators have formed an alliance to usurp Conan, engaging in vile necromancy that restores life to an ancient evil being who wields power cosmic enough to kill the king. For Conan, the Hour of the Dragon has come – the moment when he loses his hard-won throne. He may now be middle-aged, but Conan is still formidable. Armed with an indomitable will, oft-uttered oaths to Crom, his unseen God, and the fealty of loyal subjects such as the lovely Zenobia, Conan must again defy fate by forcing the draconian neck beneath his mighty blade.

The original S&S hero still bestrides the form like a colossus, making his presence felt in film versions and comic book adaptations as well as books. *The Hour of the Dragon* is the only full-length Conan novel, the remainder of his adventures being shorter narratives, all of which are collected in *The Complete Chronicles of Conan*. Further, inferior, Conan tales were completed by other hands from notes and outlines left

incomplete at the time of Howard's death. Taking precedent over ›› Tolkien by many years, it is Howard's Conan we have to thank for the tradition of high adventure and evil-destroying exploits we still enjoy in Genre Fantasy today. While other heroes fade in importance, Conan remains inviolate.

See also: *100 Must-Read Books For Men*

Read on

Solomon Kane (aka *The Savage Tales of Solomon Kane*); *Bran Mak Morn*

›› Michael Moorcock, *Phoenix in Obsidian*; Roy Thomas & Barry Windsor-Smith, *The Tower of the Elephant* (Graphic Novel)

C.J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE (1866–1944) UK

THE LOST CONTINENT (1900)

C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne was a prolific and popular writer from the 1890s to the 1930s, particularly well-known for his stories of the roguish adventurer Captain Kettle. Nearly all his work has now been forgotten. The exception is *The Lost Continent* which has been regularly reprinted in the century and more since it was first published and which has some claims to being the classic novel of the lost civilisation of Atlantis.

Theories about the mythical continent of Atlantis abounded at the end of the nineteenth century. Twenty years before Cutcliffe Hyne's novel appeared, the American writer and politician Ignatius Donnelly had published *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, in which he propounded his ideas about an ancient catastrophe which had destroyed an advanced civilisation, and Cutcliffe Hyne drew on Donnelly's book to create his fiction. His novel's main character is Deucalion, a member of Atlantis's ruling priestly elite who returns to his homeland after two decades as an imperial viceroy in an Atlantean colony in Central America. In his absence, much has changed. Atlantis is now governed by Phorenice, a beautiful empress who is determined to overthrow the old religion and establish herself as a goddess. Deucalion is first courted by the empress but eventually, driven by his devotion to the older gods and by his love for a young woman named Nais, he becomes the leader of the revolt against Phorenice. In the titanic struggle that ensues, the entire Atlantean civilisation comes crashing around their ears.

In *The Lost Continent*, Cutcliffe Hyne writes like the missing link between Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs. The imperious Phorenice cannot help but remind readers of Haggard's Ayesha; Deucalion's battles with men and monsters (Atlantis has a selection of dinosaurs and prehistoric beasts among its wildlife) prefigure John Carter's heroics on Mars. Combining swashbuckling drama and violence with a bold attempt at imagining a lost civilisation utterly different to our own, *The Lost Continent* remains a powerful and enjoyable read.

Read on

The New Eden

›› Edgar Rice Burroughs, ***At the Earth's Core***; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, ***The Maracot Deep***; John Cowper Powys, ***Atlantis***; Robert Shea & Robert Anton Wilson, ***The Eye in the Pyramid***

TOVE JANSSON (1914–2001) FINLAND

COMET IN MOOMINLAND (1946)

Despite the long shadows Norse mythology has cast over Fantasy literature, not all of the imaginative writing of Scandinavia is cast in the heroic mould. Much of it is delicate and whimsical – at least on the surface. Clearly, there is something in the air in those Viking lands, since so many notable contemporary fantasists seem to dominate the fiction of the region. Foremost amongst these quizzical authors was Tove Jannson.

While ***The Moomins and the Great Flood*** was written purely for young people, the chronicles of the Moomins begin proper with ***Comet in Moominland***. Moomintroll sets out one day to play and finds himself at the seaside, where he dives for pearl oysters which he then secretes in a cave. The next day the pearls have been mysteriously re-arranged into the shape of a star with a tail. Other auguries also indicate the coming of a comet, traditionally a harbinger of doom in European folk-lore. Concerned that the world is about to be destroyed, Moomintroll

sets off for the observatory to ask the astronomers when the comet will come. Rescuing the coquettish and somewhat empty-headed (but utterly charming) Snork Maiden from a carnivorous plant, Moomintroll worries if he will ever see Moominmamma and Moominpapa again.

The Moomin series comprises novels, comic strips, picture books, plays and poems which have been misleadingly classified purely as children's books. While the stories are often silly and charming, they also grow steadily darker and less comforting as the series progresses. Moomin Valley is populated by numerous bizarre beings, some friendly, others deadly, most anthropomorphic – the Moomins themselves being 'little trolls' according to Jansson's original publisher. Readers who may have only encountered the Moomins in adaptations not penned by Jansson herself will be surprised by the stories' sparkling Jungian symbolism, the author's fizzy, eloquent prose and notions that are both original and refreshing in their typically Nordic coolness.

✍ **Sequels:** *Finn Family Moomintroll*; *The Exploits of Moominpappa*; *Moominsummer Madness*; *Moominland Midwinter*; *Tales From Moomin Valley*; *Moominpappa at Sea*; *Moominvalley in November* (Note that this list includes only the prose fiction Moomin titles)

Read on

Knut Faldbakken, *Twilight Country*; Walter Moers, *The Thirteen and a Half Lives of Captain Bluebear*; Aarto Paasilinna, *The Year of the Hare*; Tarjei Vesaas, *The Ice Palace*

DIANA WYNNE JONES (b. 1934) UK

HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE (1986)

'In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist,' Diana Wynne Jones's funny and engaging fairytale fantasy begins, 'it is a quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three.' One of those who suffer this misfortune is Jones's young heroine Sophie Hatter and, within a few chapters, she has fallen foul of the Witch of the Waste who transforms her into a very old heroine. Changed from a young girl into an ancient crone, Sophie decides that the only way to combat witchcraft is with wizardry and heads off to consult Wizard Howl. Howl, who lives in a strange castle that hovers over the hills near Sophie's hometown, has a reputation as an eater of girls' hearts and a destroyer of their souls, but he turns out to be a relatively amiable wizard whose worst faults are an eye for a pretty face and a fickle tendency to desert the young women he admires as soon as they fall in love with him. Sophie takes up residence in his moving castle as it flits from place to place, each of its various exits opening on to a new landscape. Together with the apprentice Michael and the fire-demon Calcifer, she joins forces with Howl to assist him in his struggle against the Witch of the Waste.

Diana Wynne Jones has been writing fantasy fiction for children since the 1970s and *Howl's Moving Castle* has long been one of her most popular books. In 2004 it reached even wider audiences when it was transformed into an award-winning film by the famous Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki. It is not difficult to see the qualities in it which appealed to him. *Howl's Moving Castle* is a witty and inventive reworking of familiar fairytale characters and motifs which invites

readers to use their imaginations to the full as they follow Sophie's adventures.

Film version: *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004, animation)

Sequels: *Castle in the Air*; *House of Many Ways*

Read on
The Lives of Christopher Chant; *Dark Lord of Derkholm*
Eoin Colfer, *Artemis Fowl*; Rheinhardt Jung, *Bambert's Book of Missing Stories*

ROBERT JORDAN (1948–2007) USA

THE EYE OF THE WORLD (1990)

Series: *The Wheel of Time*

Set against the vast backdrop of millennia-long struggles between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, ***The Wheel of Time*** chronicles the adventures of Rand Al'Thor, the Dragon Reborn, and his quest to fulfil his destiny. After a short prologue, *The Eye of the World* opens in the small farming village of Emond's Field whose inhabitants are preparing for the festival of Bel Tine. Out of nowhere they are attacked by a band of Trollocs, bestial hybrids who slaughter many of the villagers. Rand Al'Thor and others choose to leave their homes for the

wider world and the stage is set for the epic history that unfolds through the other novels in the series.

Robert Jordan died before he could finish the twelfth book but the task of completing it has been undertaken by Brandon Sanderson and *A Memory of Light*, in which the elemental confrontation between good and evil will reach its culmination, is scheduled for publication at the end of 2009. Few fantasy worlds have been constructed with the same craft and skill shown by Robert Jordan in ***The Wheel of Time***. Fans can, and do, exchange thoughts on the internet about the tiniest details of the alternative world he has created. The geography, peoples and mythology of RandLand, Jordan's setting for the books, have been carefully worked out. Yet the sequence never becomes bogged down in minutiae and has a sweeping, epic quality that matches, and often surpasses, the best that other fantasy novelists can supply. On the back of the kind of fundamental struggle between the forces of good and evil that a thousand fantasy writers have tackled, Jordan builds an intelligent and adult saga in which his central characters mature and develop from naïve children to wiser but world-weary protagonists.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Great Hunt*; *The Dragon Reborn*; *The Shadow Rising*; *The Fires of Heaven*; *Lord of Chaos*; *A Crown of Swords*; *The Path of Daggers*; *Winter's Heart*; *Crossroads of Twilight*; *Knife of Dreams*; *A Memory of Light*

Read on

›› Steven Erikson, *The Devil Delivered*; J.V. Jones, *The Baker's Boy*; Scott Lynch, *The Lies of Locke Lamora*; ›› George R.R. Martin, *Hedge Knight*; Brandon Sanderson, *The Final Empire*

ANNA KAVAN (aka HELEN FERGUSON) (1901–68) UK

MERCURY (1994)

Very few upper middle-class female garden designers end up as drug addicts, but Anna Kavan was the exception. Photographs of this French-born Englishwoman reveal a delicate, genteel-looking woman, the mousy daughter of a wealthy, beautiful society lady, who found her background overbearing. A born outsider, Kavan was married and divorced twice and lost her only son in World War II. Perpetually traumatised, Kavan started taking heroin, further attempting to redefine her fragile identity by taking on the name of a character in her early novels. Her fiction gained little success or acclaim until ›› Brian Aldiss selected her book *Ice* as his favourite SF novel of the year for 1967. Kavan was apparently delighted by this recognition of her modernist genius but she was discovered dead the following year, with a syringe stuck in her arm (although her demise was reputedly not due to an overdose).

Ice has long been a cult book but Kavan's other work remains neglected. The posthumously-published *Mercury* is perhaps the purest distillation of her cool, unique genius. The narrative revolves around the almost transparent, wraithlike woman Luz. Her striking appearance entrances Luke who follows his opaque quarry across an array of peculiar imaginary landscapes into an oddly-becalmed tangle of jungle. Here the eerie cadences of the lemur's songs create a counterpointed echo for Luke's obsession with Luz. Both characters are desperate to escape from unsatisfactory pasts composed of fractured relationships, but there is danger in the siren call of the primates, whose haunting entreaties seem to indicate that Luke and Luz could end up preserved in the perpetual amber of an emotional fugue.

Hallucinatory, rhythmic and shimmering like the liquid metal that provides its title, ***Mercury*** is both a metaphor for Kavan's damaged psyche and an attempt to communicate the cocooning solace of heroin addiction. It is also one of the most arresting and accessible Surrealist Fantasies ever published.

Read on

The House of Sleep

›› Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly*; William S. Burroughs, *Ghost of Chance*; Comte de Lautréamont, *Maldoror*; Boris Vian, *Froth on the Daydream*

GUY GAVRIEL KAY (b. 1954) CANADA

TIGANA (1990)

Few writers can have had a more propitious and promising introduction to the creation of Fantasy fiction than Guy Gavriel Kay who was still a student at the University of Manitoba when he was given the opportunity to assist Christopher Tolkien in the editing of his late father's unpublished writings. Kay moved to Oxford to work on what later became ***The Silmarillion***. The first fiction of Kay's own to attract attention was ***The Fionavar Tapestry***, a bestselling trilogy in which a group of Canadian university students are drawn into a magical world where each of them has a particular role to play and destiny to fulfil.

Tigana, set in an alternative world not unlike medieval or Renaissance Italy, is as intriguing and as morally complex a work of fantasy as any Kay has written in the quarter of a century since his debut.

After decades of warfare, the Palm peninsula has been divided between two sorcerers-cum-warlords named Brandin and Alberico. Many years before the novel begins Brandin's beloved son was killed in the fighting and Tigana, the province which brought about his death, was placed under a curse which means that its very name has been erased from memory and history. Nonetheless it clings to its ideas of independence and Alessan, the last prince of Tigana's royal house, emerges to organise a campaign of resistance against the tyrants. Meanwhile, within the walls of Brandin's palace, the sorceror's favourite concubine Dianora, unbeknown to her master, is herself a woman of Tigana and has vowed to kill him. Only her growing love for Brandin, the very man responsible for the destruction of her land, stands in the way of her success. Telling a compelling story and skilfully exploring ideas about the survival of memory in a political state committed to its suppression, *Tigana* is an exciting, intelligent and sophisticated exercise in world-building.

Read on

The Fionavar Tapestry (*The Summer Tree*; *The Wandering Fire*; *The Darkest Road*); *The Last Light of the Sun*

Lois McMaster Bujold, *The Curse of Chalion*; C.J. Cherryh, *The Paladin*; Katherine Kurtz, *Deryni Rising*

STEPHEN KING (b. 1947) USA

THE GUNSLINGER (collected 1982)

Series: *The Dark Tower*

Although he was, for many years, the bestselling novelist in the world, Stephen King remains a writer who divides readers. To some, he is nothing but a populist hack, churning out interminable and over-rated horror pot-boilers, while to others (including many major novelists) he is an artist with an enviable ability to make the fantastic appear realistic in his mastery of the mundane detail of ordinary character's lives.

After trying his luck as an SF author without success, King's first published novel *Carrie* was a massive blockbuster, establishing him as the world's undisputed leading horror writer. Numerous other classics of dark fantasy flowed from his pen and after a few years, it seemed that while King could still entertain us, he rarely surprised us. Then came *The Gunslinger*, initially published as a serial in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Literary types immediately saw the obvious reflections of Browning's poetry and ›› C.S. Lewis in the text, which King intended to act as a hybrid of Spaghetti Western and Tolkienesque quest narrative. How successfully he married Fantasy to the Western is open to debate but he certainly made readers who had previously dismissed him sit up and take notice.

The Gunslinger made a refreshing change to the predictability of paint-by-numbers S&S fantasy publishing in the 1980s. Roland of Gilead is the Last Gunslinger, a champion who steps between worlds to seek companions in his hunt for the Man in Black, whom he pursues across an endless wasteland. A cross between an Arthurian knight and the Clint Eastwood of *Unforgiven*, his enigmatic, arid personality lures

the reader into the desolate opening chapters of the book, whose spacious, biblical cadences give the lie to the claim that King never concentrates on style. Arguably his most accomplished and multifaceted work, ***The Dark Tower*** is an essential part of the contemporary Fantasy canon, and it has been enjoyed by many readers who never saw themselves as King fans.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Drawing of the Three*; *The Wastelands*; *Wizard and Glass*; *Wolves of the Calla*; *Song of Susannah*; *The Dark Tower*

Read on

›› James Lee Burke, *In the Electric Mist With Confederate Dead*; William S. Burroughs, *The Place of Dead Roads*; Joe Lansdale, *Dead in the West*; Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

TANITH LEE (b. 1947) UK

THE BOOK OF THE DAMNED (1988)

Series: *The Secret Books of Paradys*

Before the gender-bending breathlessness of Anne Rice and the transsexual politics of Storm Constantine, before Goth became a uniform, came Tanith Lee. Blessed with the name (and striking appearance) of a Moon Goddess, Lee has remained too much in the commercial

shadows. Starting her career as a children's writer, it was inevitable that a juvenile market would prove too restrictive for Lee's florid imagination. Adult novels showcasing her facility with S&S and Planetary Romance followed, boldly exploring sexual taboos through quest narratives studded with dynastic intrigue.

Although her ***Flat Earth*** novels remain favourites, the ***Paradys*** sequence is Lee at her suitably excessive best, set in a symbolist city that acts as a portal to supernatural realms and other times, her outsider protagonists dallying with unhuman beings, falling victim (sometimes half-willingly) to strange obsessions and curses. Nothing is sacred to Lee – incest, cross-dressing, rape, vampirism – but the behaviour of the characters in *The Book of the Damned* is the only fitting response to the labyrinthine enigma of Paradys itself. Ultimately, when her protagonists go on quests through the shifting realities of Lee's city, they are really seeking for themselves.

For anyone who has ever questioned the true nature of their identity in our mundane world, a construct that forces safe choices upon us when we dream of other, more psychologically satisfying options, the chronicles of Paradys offer us livid metaphors for our hidden desires. They are also the paragon of dark Fantasy entertainment, Lee's lip-smacking prose style proving something to savour even if the reader cannot relate intimately to the dilemmas of her damaged, transcendence-seeking antiheroes.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Book of the Beast*; *The Book of the Dead*; *The Book of the Mad* (Omnibus Edition: *The Secret Books of Paradys*)

Read on

Night's Master

Storm Constantine, *The Enchantments of Flesh and Spirit*; Suzi McKee Charnas, *The Vampire Tapestry*; Anne Rice, *The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*

READONATHEME: DARK FANTASIES

Fantasy filled with supernatural shadows

Ramsey Campbell, *The Hungry Moon*
Thomas M. Disch, *The Businessman*
Joe Hill, *20th Century Ghosts*
›› Robert Holdstock (as Robert Faulcon), *The Stalking*
Geoffrey Household, *The Sending*
›› Fritz Leiber, *Our Lady of Darkness*
Anne Rice, *The Witching Hour*
Dan Simmons, *Carrion Comfort*
Lisa Tuttle, *Gabriel*
Colin Wilson, *The Return of the Lloigor*

URSULA K. LE GUIN (b. 1929) USA

A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA (1968)

Series: *Earthsea*

The Isle of Gont is celebrated all over Earthsea as a breeding ground for Wizards. Ged, a young goatherd receives minor magical training from his aunt, who recognises his future greatness. When ship-borne invaders threaten to sack Ged's hometown, the boy uses his inborn gift for sorcery to swell a small fog into a mighty mist to confuse the raiders and give the Gontish people an advantage. His talent plain, Ged is soon whisked off to Roake, the island school where would-be Wizards are tutored in the ways of magic. Shepherded by the wise mage Ogion, Ged adopts the name of Sparrowhawk and takes his first steps toward Magehood. But in his hubris, the boy has awakened an infernal force from the realm of the shades and even his nascent spell-calling might not save him now.

A Wizard of Earthsea was the first in a trilogy of short novels disguised as children's books. Their true, hidden nature soon became apparent to Fantasy enthusiasts and before too long these books were recognised as more than mere escapism. The magic of ***Earthsea*** is based upon the might of names and naming, the secret meanings of words, the ageless wisdom of women and the endless recklessness of men. As our Wizard evolves, his name changes from Duny to Ged to Sparrowhawk, he speaks with bested Dragons, triumphs against evil and learns humility as he matures to understand the value and power of women. With *Tehanu*, the series deepens even further, addressing the author's concerns about nature and feminism more directly, with a quiet yet unsurpassed majesty.

Le Guin's SF masterpieces *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* frame the initial ***Earthsea*** trilogy (all five books were published within a six year period), which is undoubtedly the best-written Genre Fantasy series ever produced. For anyone who ever wondered where the original academy for Wizards was before Rowling's Hogwarts, the answer – and many other answers – lies in these sublime novels.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Tombs of Atuan*; *The Farthest Shore*; *Tehanu*; *The Other Wind*; *Tales From Earthsea* (Omnibus Edition: *The Earthsea Quartet*, which includes the first four volumes)

Read on
Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences; ***Annals of the Western Shore*** (*Gifts*; *Voices*; *Powers*)
›› Patricia McKillip, *The Riddle Master of Hed;* Robin McKinley, *The Blue Sword*

FRITZ LEIBER (1910–92) USA

SWORDS AND DEVILTRY (collected 1971)

In the northern wastes of the world called Newhon lies Cold Corner, a place where women rule their men with a magical iron fist that brings deadly chills and racking coughs. Fafhrd is a tall, tawny barbarian, son of a tribal matriarch, eager to learn the ways of civilisation. When a troupe of

actors visits this frozen realm, Fafhrd defies the women of the Snow Clan and his fate begins to coalesce. Meantime, a small-statured and equally provincial young sorcerer's apprentice called Mouse, whose instincts draw him to the left-hand path of the occult, is castigated by his master for an apparent love of the blade as a means of resolving problems. In the kingdom of Lankhmar, the City of the Black Toga, the duo will fall in with each other, finding their destiny as thieves, reavers and slayers.

Leiber was already a master Horror/SF scribe when he brought two characters created by his friend Harry Otto Fischer to vibrant life. 'The Snow Women' and 'The Unholy Grail' are the stories that introduce Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, the greatest double act in the history of S&S. Numerous other tales followed, notably 'Ill Met in Lankhmar' which (confusingly) won the SF Nebula award. The stories cited here can be found in the first volume of the sequence, *Swords Against Deviltry*.

Leiber's work can be summed up in one word: class. His S&S has a more magisterial tone than anyone else's – elegant wit, poised melancholy and dazzling yet understated wordplay make the high adventures of his dynamic duo far more pleasurable to read than so many of the ponderous, cliché-ridden hacks who ride on his coat-tails. With an equal appeal to adults, young people, genre fans and literary readers, Leiber's S&S is quite simply the gold standard by which all other Heroic Fantasies should be judged. Leiber was also an actor with an impressive stage and screen career (he appears in the 1943 *Phantom of the Opera*, for example) and this flair for colourful drama shows in his pacy, theatrical writings.

✍ **Sequels:** *Swords Against Death*; *Swords in the Mist*; *Swords Against Wizardry*; *The Swords of Lankhmar*; *Swords and Ice Magic*;

The Knight and Knave of Swords (Omnibus Editions: *The First Book of Lankhmar* (aka *Lankhmar*), *The Second Book of Lankhmar*)

Read on

Lin Carter, *The Wizard of Lemuria*; ›› Robert E. Howard, *King Kull*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *The Sailor On The Seas Of Fate*; Andre Norton, *Witch World*

C.S. LEWIS (1898–1963) UK

THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE (1950)

Series: *Narnia*

An academic who taught at both Oxford and Cambridge, Lewis wrote and published on a wide range of subjects from medieval and Renaissance literature to Christian theology. His ***Narnia*** books, published in the 1950s, rapidly established themselves as children's classics and the magical kingdom reached through a piece of furniture is familiar to generations of young people.

Four siblings (Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie) are evacuated from wartime London in 1940 and go and live with a professor in a large and ancient house in the country. One day, as the children are playing hide-and-seek, the youngest Pevensie, Lucy, ventures into a massive wardrobe in one of the rooms of the rambling old house. She discovers that the wardrobe gives access to another, snow-covered world. There she meets a faun named Mr Tumnus who tells her that she has arrived

in Narnia, a land condemned to endure permanent winter by its ruler, the White Witch. When she returns to the everyday world, she cannot initially persuade the others that she is telling the truth about what she has seen but eventually all of the children make the journey, via the wardrobe, to Narnia. There they become involved in an epic confrontation between the wicked White Witch and the redemptive figure of Aslan, the Great Lion whose return to Narnia heralds the end of her wintry reign.

Some readers have found the Christian symbolism of the ***Narnia*** books too blatant and intrusive ('needlessly messianic' in the words of one critic) but it is better seen as adding another level of meaning to what is, at heart, a richly imagined fantasy about the confrontation between good and evil.

Film version: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005)

Sequels: *Prince Caspian*; *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; *The Silver Chair*; *The Horse and His Boy*; *The Last Battle*

Prequel: *The Magician's Nephew*

Read on

Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*; Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*; E. Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*

MEGAN LINDHOLM aka ROBIN HOBB (b. 1952) USA

WIZARD OF THE PIGEONS (1985)

Margaret Lindholm Ogden has been one of the most prolific and widely admired American Fantasy writers of the last thirty years. Since the mid-nineties, working under the pseudonym of Robin Hobb, she has written several much-acclaimed sequences of novels set in a fantasy world of knights and chivalry known as The Realm of the Elderlings. In the decade before that, writing as Megan Lindholm, she produced series (including one set in a prehistoric North America), and stand-alone novels. Of the latter, ***Wizard of the Pigeons*** stands out as a key work in the development of the Urban Fantasy sub-genre.

The novel is set in Seattle and its central character is a homeless man living on the streets of the city. At first sight, Wizard and his fellow hobos, such as Rasputin and Cassie, are nothing more than down-and-outs but, in truth, they are magical characters responsible for the well-being of Seattle. Wizard possesses an array of special powers but, in order to retain them, he must abide by the rules of magic. He must remain celibate, he must be willing to listen when people tell him of their troubles, he must never have more than a dollar in his pocket and he must look after the city's pigeons. As the novel opens the forces at work in Seattle are in balance but a malevolent power named Mir is about to descend upon the city and it soon becomes clear that Mir has some kind of connection with Wizard. The secret magus of the streets needs to draw upon every resource he possesses to combat the darkness from his own past. Brilliantly combining richly observed detail of real street life with her magical confrontation between light and dark, Megan Lindholm creates an original, stylish narrative.

Read on

Assassin's Apprentice (as Robin Hobb, the first book in the ***Farseer*** Trilogy); *The Gypsy* (with Steven Brust); *The Reindeer People* (as Megan Lindholm)
Emma Bull, *War for the Oaks*

READONATHEME: URBAN FANTASY

In which magic and contemporary fantasy hit the streets of real cities

Jim Butcher, *Storm Front*
Charles de Lint, *Moonheart*
Sergei Lukyanenko, *The Night Watch*
Martin Millar, *The Good Fairies of New York*
›› Tim Powers, *Last Call*
Ekaterina Sedia, *The Secret History of Moscow*
Will Shetterly, *Elsewhere*
Sean Stewart, *Galveston*

DAVID LINDSAY (1876–1945) UK

A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS (1920)

David Lindsay was a Scottish writer whose works made little impact on the public during his lifetime and have been forgotten in the decades since his death, with the exception of the bizarre and unforgettable vision entitled *A Voyage to Arcturus*.

At a séance in Hampstead, two men, Maskull and Nightspore, join the gathering of drawing-room dabblers in spiritualism and the apparition of a young man takes shape. At this point, another man, named Krag, suddenly bursts into the séance, reviles the apparition and appears to wring its neck. As the gathering breaks up, Krag departs with Maskull and Nightspore, inviting them to accompany him to Tormance, a planet circling the star Arcturus. Accepting Krag's invitation they board a strange craft which takes them to the distant planet. Maskull sleeps during the journey and awakens to find himself alone on Tormance. 'A naked stranger in a huge, foreign, mystical world', he begins to meet some of its inhabitants and these encounters propel him further in a bizarre pilgrimage towards an ultimate revelation. Each encounter ends in disaster and often death but each one moves him forward on his journey. Eventually, his travels through the alien landscapes of Tormance bring him back into contact with Krag and Nightspore and he learns the truth about them and about his own self.

No less a writer than ›› C.S. Lewis once described *A Voyage to Arcturus* as 'that shattering, intolerable and irresistible work'. It is certainly one of the oddest novels of the twentieth century and one of the most difficult to categorise. In précis it sounds like a work of SF but Lindsay has no interest in the kind of themes and ideas that usually

exercise the imaginations of SF writers. *A Voyage to Arcturus* reads instead like an allegorical hybrid of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Nietzschean philosophy. Lindsay uses the strange new world he has created to wrestle with questions of good and evil and the existence of God. His fantasy about a journey to another world becomes the vehicle for daring speculation about nothing less than the meaning of human life.

Read on

The Haunted Woman

Harold Bloom, *The Flight to Lucifer* (a sequel to Lindsay's work written by the well-known American literary critic who has since disowned it); John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance*; Colin Wilson, *Haunted Man: The Strange Genius of David Lindsay* (non-fiction)

H.P. LOVECRAFT (1890–1937) USA

AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS (1936)

Lovecraft was the successor of Poe and a precursor to Stephen King in the great lineage of American Gothic writers which stretches back to Charles Brockden Brown, the first fully professional US author. The doyen of *Weird Tales* magazine, Lovecraft is usually depicted by commentators as a reclusive, oversensitive hypochondriac with a pronounced conservative streak and racist tendencies. A rabid

anglophile (he hailed from New England), Lovecraft's correspondence with other writers ran to thousands of letters. The crude vigour of his purple vocabulary and morbid excesses of his imagination resulted in a literary legacy for which most writers can only long. He is idolised by teenagers, intellectuals, role-playing gamesters, horror fans and almost everyone who savours imaginative fiction, the epitome of that precious thing, the good bad writer.

Lovecraft is best known for creating a cosmology later dubbed ***The Cthulhu Mythos***, whose fundamental premise is that a race of ancient beings from outer space took up residence on Earth in prehistory but were expelled by an older pantheon of gods for using black magic. While some of his fiction has no connection to this loose milieu, *At The Mountains of Madness*, a novel that describes an Antarctic expedition that finds evidence of intelligent life on Earth long before mankind makes for excellent preparatory study for readers willing to immerse themselves in the addictive cosmic awe and terror of the Mythos.

When buying Lovecraft, the only editions that will do are the definitive hardcovers from Arkham House, the press founded after his death specifically to ensure his works remained in print. The complete Lovecraft tales are spread across three volumes. *At The Mountains of Madness* contains not only the eponymous title work, but Lovecraft's other full-length novels, such as the ›› Dunsany-influenced *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*. *The Dunwich Horror and Others* rounds up the longer Mythos tales while *Dagon* collects the short stories. UK readers on a budget should plump for the recently reissued omnibuses from HarperCollins

Read on

The Horror in the Museum and Other Revisions

Ramsey Campbell (ed), ***New Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos***; August Derleth (ed), ***Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos***; Brian Lumley, ***The Burrowers Beneath***; Colin Wilson, ***The Philosopher's Stone***

ELIZABETH A. LYNN **(b. 1946)** USA

WATCHTOWER (1979)

Series: *Chronicle of Tornor*

Despite the homo-eroticism that lurks not so far beneath the surface of some classic fantasy fiction, writers in the past have often been uncomfortable with the idea of same-sex relationships. Most frequently they have simply ignored them. One of the first authors to introduce gay or lesbian characters sympathetically into their fiction and to treat them as integral and often unremarkable figures in their imaginative landscapes was Elizabeth A. Lynn. In her well-known 1978 SF novel, ***A Different Light***, the central character, the artist Jimson Alleca, is gay, and love and desire and artistic curiosity are at the heart of his decision to venture beyond his limits.

The year after the publication of ***A Different Light***, the first volume of a trilogy appeared and won the WFA. The watchtower of the book's title is Tornor Keep which stands guard at the northernmost edge of the land of Arun and, when it falls to invading forces, the life of young Errel, Lord

of the Keep, is in danger. In order to save his lord's life, the warrior Ryke agrees to serve the man who has conquered Tornor. Only when Errel and Ryke, in company with two hermaphroditic envoys of peace, escape from the Keep and head for a legendary land where it is said to be eternal summer can the true struggle against the invaders begin.

Watchtower takes many of the standard characters and motifs of Heroic Fantasy and then turns them on their heads. The war-torn world in which the action takes place is not unfamiliar but the sophistication of the attitude to war is. The characters seem at first to be recognisable types, but they have a depth and a reality that characters in formula fantasies rarely possess.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Dancers of Arun*; *Northern Girl*

Read on

Dragon's Winter; *Dragon's Treasure*
Mercedes Lackey, *Magic's Pawn*; Fiona Patton, *The Stone Prince*

GEORGE MACDONALD (1824–1905) UK

LILITH (1895)

'I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master,' ›› C.S. Lewis wrote, referring to the Victorian novelist, poet and writer of Christian Fantasy George MacDonald. The creator of Narnia is only one of many well-known authors who have expressed an admiration for MacDonald over the years. MacDonald was born near Aberdeen and was educated at the university there before he made his way south in the late 1840s. After unsuccessful spells as a religious minister in Sussex and in Manchester, he settled in London with the intention of forging a career as a writer. Over the next fifty years he published a wide range of works, from books of poetry to novels of Scottish country life but it was children's books such as *The Princess and the Goblin* and *At the Back of the North Wind* that gained him his largest readership.

Lilith is a strange and haunting work of fiction, half an allegory of the Christian soul's journey to salvation, in the tradition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and half a Fantasy novel which was to influence the future history of the genre almost as much as the works of MacDonald's near contemporary, ›› William Morris. The narrative follows the adventures of Mr Vane who inherits an ancient manor house in the English countryside and discovers that it contains a portal into another world. In this world, he encounters Adam and Eve, a community of self-governing babies and children, a deathly princess, who turns out to be Adam's first wife, Lilith, and a city where the streets are stalked by two magical leopardesses. Through his experiences in the alternative universe he discovers, Vane is brought face to face with the deeper meanings of life and death, with man's fall from grace and with the

redemptive power of God. The book, with its forays into sickly sentimentality about children and theological speculation, can occasionally be off-putting to a modern reader but the power of MacDonald's visionary imagination is undeniable.

Read on

Phantastes; *The Princess and the Goblin*

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*; ›› C.S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*

GEORGE R.R. MARTIN (b. 1948) USA

A GAME OF THRONES (1996)

Series: *A Song of Ice and Fire*

In George R.R. Martin, Fantasy finally has its Machiavelli. Such is the appeal of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, general readers who never touch the genre and individuals totally jaded with the genre have dubbed the series a masterpiece. The broad, yet never unrealistic scope of the series, the intricate yet lucid plotting, the thrill-appeal of the twists and the dazzling ruthlessness of its cast have many forebears in the annals of literature and history (including *Ivanhoe*, *I, Claudius*, *The Twelve Caesars* and the Wars of the Roses) but the sheer ambition of Martin's quasi-chivalric vision remains his own.

A Game of Thrones is a stunning opening gambit, eight hundred pages that fly by like the flapping of a raven's wing. It has none of the weaknesses of other, overblown Tolkienisms on the market, owing more to the tautness of ›› Zelazny, the tortured battle angst of ›› Moorcock and the icy savagery of Wagner's operas. Written in third person, focusing on the activities of nine major characters, the book introduces Westeros, an inter-ice age prehistoric island. Different kingdoms are ruled by a number of noble families, but the realm has one omnipotent Monarch. Following the fortunes of House Stark, former Kings in the North, we see the family fall afoul of a rival house's plot to depose the king and seize the throne.

The greatest strength of *A Game of Thrones* lies in its magnificent characters; some are honourable, most implacable, but all – especially the charismatic and handicapped Tyrion Lannister – are unforgettable. The supernatural content of the novel is minimal, but when eldritch events do occur, their impact on the reader is immense. Martin tightens knots of knuckle-whitening tension into the set pieces and the triple-climax at the close of the book is simply exhilarating. Lacking the space here to do this magnificent series justice, we urge you to put this book down and pick up *A Game of Thrones* immediately.

See also: *100 Must-Read Books For Men*

Sequels: *A Clash of Kings*; *A Storm of Swords*; *A Feast For Crows*; *A Dance With Dragons* (The UK edition of *A Storm of Swords* is divided into two volumes, subtitled *Steel and Snow* and *Blood and Gold* respectively)

Read on
Dreamsongs (aka *GRRM: A Retrospective*); *The Armageddon Rag*; *Windhaven* (with Lisa Tuttle)
Greg Keyes, *The Briar King*; Stephen R. Lawhead, *Hood*

PATRICIA A. McKILLIP (b. 1948) USA

THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD (1974)

Sybel is the dreamy, capricious great-granddaughter of a Mage. Residing upon a rustic mountain, away from the conflicts and intrigues of kings and treasures, she husbands a fantastic menagerie of enchanted animals collected by her now deceased father. Like her sire, Sybel has a gift for calling the most magnificent and marvellous creatures to join her garden of mythological delights, speaking to them all in a language that evades most mortal men. Cloistered in her zoological haven, Sybel has disregarded the world of people until one day a knight arrives, bearing Tam, a baby boy. Against her better judgement, Sybel takes on the child, a refugee from war, aided by an elderly witch-woman who lives nearby. Soon the Beastmistress learns to love the boy more than her awesome pets. But Tam is heir to a disputed throne and, like it or not, his destiny will draw Sybel into intrigues that even the forgotten beasts of Eld will struggle to escape.

Although it was first issued as a children's book, *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* has a still grandeur that sets it apart from the many other

fantasies by female authors that sprang up in the wake of ›› Le Guin's ***Earthsea*** books. Its limpid prose gives its story the timelessness of a fable. Its author's indubitable ability to convey a magic that is as restrained as it is potent won plaudits from fantasy buffs and the novel won the WFA in the year after its first publication. Despite much critical acclaim, Patricia McKillip is still comparatively obscure, probably due to the fact that she has avoided the financial lure of producing clichéd doorstop-sized trilogies. She has focused instead on her craft, quietly producing excellent singletons and diptychs that reveal a deep reverence for the stuff of pure fantasy. Admirers of ›› Le Guin and European faerie tales should look no further than McKillip's highly accomplished works.

Read on

The Riddle Master Trilogy (*The Riddle Master of Hed*; *Heir of Sea and Fire*; *Harpist in the Wind*); *Ombria in Shadow*

R.A. Macavoy, *Damiano*; Louise Murphy, *The True Story of Hansel and Gretel*; Nancy Springer, *The White Hart*; Jane Yolen, *Sword of the Rightful King*

A. MERRITT (1884–1943) USA

THE SHIP OF ISHTAR (1924)

In the 1920s and 1930s, Abraham Merritt was a highly successful and well-paid journalist who worked for a weekly magazine that was part of the Hearst media empire. Almost as a sideline he wrote and published Fantastic fiction in the pulp magazines. Many of his stories, from *The Moon Pool*, published in 1919, to *Dwellers in the Mirage*, which appeared thirteen years later, are narratives of lost worlds and lost civilisations in which stout-hearted American adventurers come face to face with weird and wonderful races inhabiting the furthest flung and unexplored corners of the world. With their elements of horror and the supernatural, these stories are crude but compelling and ›› H.P. Lovecraft was an admirer of them.

Merritt's most original and memorable piece of fiction is *The Ship of Ishtar* which tells the story of a modern man dragged into a primeval struggle between ancient forces of light and dark. John Kenton is a young American archaeologist and adventurer who discovers the model of a ship in a block of stone unearthed from the sands of Babylon. The miniature ship is but the shadowy symbol of another, full-scale ship which is a battleground between the supporters of Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of light and love, and those of Nergal, the god of death. Kenton is whisked from the real world to the world of the ship and pitched headlong into the fight. Faced by pitiless foes and eager to win the love of a beautiful priestess of Ishtar, Kenton is transformed into a muscled warrior who wields his sword to devastating effect against the devotees of Nergal. *The Ship of Ishtar* gives Merritt the scope to indulge his often lurid imagination and his taste for the lushest of

adjective-laden prose to the maximum. The result is a full-blooded pulp fantasy which still possesses the power to pull readers into its robustly-imagined world.

Read on
The Metal Monster; *Dwellers in the Mirage*
Otis Adelbert Kline, *Planet of Peril*; ›› H.P. Lovecraft, *Dagon*; ›› Robert Silverberg, *Gilgamesh The King*

CHINA MIÉVILLE (b. 1972) UK

PERDIDO STREET STATION (2000)

Series: *New Crobuzon*

In New Crobuzon, humans and mutants and Xenians, bizarrely alien life-forms, live together amidst the lowering architecture of the sprawling city. Khepri, human in body but equipped with the heads of insects, share the streets with cactus-people, the froglike, water-loving Vodyanoi, and Remades, men and women who have had weird prostheses, both organic and mechanical, attached to their bodies. Into this menacing metropolis comes Yagharek, one of a desert race of intelligent bird-men known as the garuda, who has been punished by his people. For some mysterious transgression, he has had his wings sawn off. He hates the city but he is in search of someone who can return the gift of flight to him and he approaches a renegade scientist

named Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin. When Isaac undertakes research into flying creatures, he inadvertently sets in motion a terrible train of events. Amidst the menagerie he gathers in his laboratory is one curious and seemingly harmless caterpillar which eventually metamorphoses into a terrifying predator, intent on sucking the dreams and the consciousnesses from all of New Crobuzon's sentient citizens. Only Isaac and Yagharek and a motley crew of outcasts stands between the city and total devastation.

Over the last decade, China Miéville has emerged as the leading writer of what has been termed The New Weird. His fiction is the product of an exceptionally acute intelligence and, unlike so many imaginative worlds, Miéville's is, within its own terms, an entirely convincing one. Once you suspend disbelief sufficiently to accept that it might exist, the politics, power structures and ethnography of New Crobuzon seem absolutely right. *Perdido Street Station* was the first of several novels he has set amidst its extraordinary cityscape and amidst the larger world of Bas-Lag in which it is situated. It demonstrates to the full the pullulating imagination which has made China Miéville one of the most admired and influential of all fantasy writers to emerge in the twenty-first century.

Read on

The Scar; *The Iron Council* (the other ***New Crobuzon*** novels)
Jeffrey Ford, *The Physiognomy*; ›› M. John Harrison, *Signs of Life*; Ian R. MacLeod, *The Light Ages*

READONATHEME: THE NEW WEIRD

Textured tales of high strangeness in contemporary Fantasy

Daniel Abraham, *The Long Price*
K.J. Bishop, *Black Dog*
Hal Duncan, *Vellum: The Book of All Hours*
Felix Gilman, *Thunderer*
Jay Lake, *Mainspring*
Sarah Monette, *Melusine*
Charles Stross, *The Atrocity Archives*
Steph Swainston, *The Year of Our War*
Jeff Vandermeer & Mark Roberts (eds.), *The Thackeray T. Lambshead Guide to Eccentric and Discredited Diseases*
Jeff VanderMeer, *Shriek: An Afterword*

HOPE MIRRLEES (1887–1978) UK

LUD-IN-THE-MIST (1926)

Hope Mirrlees was a novelist, poet and translator who was born in Kent and educated at Newnham College, Cambridge where she studied Classics. During her time at university, Mirrlees met Jane Harrison, author of ground-breaking studies of Greek mythology and religion, and

she lived with the older woman from 1913 until Harrison's death in 1928. Harrison and Mirrlees knew many of the members of the Bloomsbury Group and Mirrlees's first book, *Paris: A Poem*, was published by Leonard and ›› Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1918. She went on to write three novels but, of these, only *Lud-in-the-Mist* can be classified as Fantasy.

The unlikely hero of this strange and memorable book is Nathaniel Chanticleer, honest burgher and sometime mayor of the port of Lud-in-the-Mist. The town is situated in Dorimare, a land which borders Fairyland, although 'there had ... been no intercourse between the two countries for many centuries'. Over these many years, the people of Dorimare have grown fearful and suspicious of their fairy neighbours and, in particular, they dread the influence of 'fairy fruit' which alters and enraptures all those who eat it or drink its juice. When Chanticleer stumbles upon an underground plot to smuggle the fairy fruit into Dorimare and discovers that his own children have been spirited away as a consequence of it, he becomes an unlikely knight errant, riding across the border into Fairyland to rescue them.

According to ›› Michael Swanwick, a modern admirer of the book, *Lud-in-the-Mist* is 'that rarest of creatures, the fantasy novel of ideas'. With its interest in the boundaries between the ordinary and the fantastic, it is reminiscent of *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, published only two years earlier, but Mirrlees's novel provides a more down-to-earth fairyland than ›› Lord Dunsany's ethereal masterpiece. It is a book that has often been neglected in the eighty years since it was written but that deserves to take a prominent place in the history of the fantasy genre.

Read on

C.J. Cherryh, *Faery in Shadow*; ›› Lord Dunsany, *The Book of Wonder*; ›› L. Sprague De Camp & Fletcher Pratt, *Land of Unreason*; Ellen Kushner, *Thomas the Rhymer*; Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Kingdoms of Elfin*

MICHAEL MOORCOCK (b. 1939) UK

Series: *The Eternal Champion*

Both as a literary stylist and an inspiration for others, Moorcock is the most accomplished author to ever grace Genre Fantasy. No one has been more important in maintaining the Fantastic tradition in general literature, while expanding the boundaries of fiction itself through his work as a social novelist, SF writer, pioneering magazine editor and S&S innovator. A professional author since the age of fifteen, his continuing career and monumental achievement is without walls, also encompassing music, poetry and comics.

Moorcock's ouevre is haunted by a hero known as The Eternal Champion. Present in thousands of parallel worlds, pivotal in the endless conflict for balance between Law and Chaos, the avatars of the Champion – including Elric, Corum, Hawkmoon and Erekose amongst others – are Moorcock's method of exploring the thorny moral questions that plague humanity. The interstitial realm of myriad worlds

inhabited by different aspects of the Champion is a quantum cosmology known as the Multiverse. Arguably, the chronicles of the Multiverse consist of Moorcock's complete fictional works and are best understood as one single, massive novel. Due to the intense complexity of Moorcock's bibliography and for details of sequels and prequels to our selected titles below, we recommend visiting www.multiverse.org for the latest information, updated bibliographies of omnibus editions and related debate.

There is no definitive reading order for the Multiverse, but we have chosen *Elric of Melnibone* as perhaps the best place to begin. Doomed and weary, Elric is complex and utterly compelling, the towering outsider icon of S&S, the anti-Aragorn, the non-Conan. Our other selection represents the Multiverse at its most literary and sophisticated, *The City in the Autumn Stars* being the Fantastic equivalent of the great social novels of the Enlightenment. Be warned: Moorcock is highly addictive – as you read and re-read his works, more connections between them emerge, the messages become increasingly trenchant and you become ever more entranced. When it comes to putting magic into fiction, Moorcock simply is *the* Magus.

ELRIC OF MELNIBONE (collected 1972)

The empire of Melnibone has been fading for aeons and, in its decadent shadow, the young kingdoms of humanity are vying for mastery of the world. The Melniboneans are cruel, cold beings, adepts in sorcery, austere traditionalists who once ruled with a grip of steel. Elric, their anaemic albino emperor, a weakling kept alive by herbs and spells, is an aesthete who wishes he could avoid the responsibilities of his throne and spend his days pondering the implications of new concepts

such as 'morality' instead. The Melnibonean court often doubts Elric's suitability, some wishing a harsher, more conventional monarch had succeeded to the ruby throne. Such a figure is waiting in the wings – Yyrkoon, Elric's malevolent cousin. Sensing Elric's indolence, Yyrkoon strikes, sparking off a chain of events that will see the emperor fulfil his tempestuous destiny. Assisted by his sly patron demon Arioch, the Knight of the Swords, Elric will clash with Yyrkoon in the mystic plane of the Pulsing Cavern, where two black swords hang suspended, runes flickering upon their sides. These are sentient blades that drink souls, and when Elric takes up the one named Stormbringer, he will betray his people, damn his kin and calamitously embrace his weird in his search to find the meaning of the way things are.

Elric's torments started appearing (out of sequence in terms of internal chronology) in 1961 and have thrilled generations of readers. The best S&S stories ever, they cannot be recommended highly enough to devotees of epic blood and thunder filigreed with symbolism and complicated by existential issues.

Read on

Jewel in the Skull; *The Knight of the Swords*; *The Final Programme*; *The Eternal Champion*

THE CITY IN THE AUTUMN STARS (1986)

In the aftermath of Robespierre's Terror that followed the French Revolution, Manfred Von Bek, whose family are said to be ambivalent servants of Satan in his quest for the Holy Grail, as well as unsleeping searchers for a cure to the World's Pain, narrowly escapes from Paris. After various picaresque adventures, Von Bek finds himself in the

otherworldly middle-European city of Mirenberg, where he will encounter a talking philosopher Fox who admires Diderot and the incomparable lady Libussa. Meanwhile, the villainous Klosterheim and his minions have plans to enable Lucifer and knobble Von Bek, who becomes embroiled with Libussa in an alchemical experiment that mirrors key events in Moorcock's ***Jerry Cornelius*** novels.

Although *The City in the Autumn Stars* can be read as an individual book, it is also part of the loose ***Von Bek Dynasty***, the most mature of Moorcock's fantasy sequences, which itself intersects closely with the later exploits of Elric in what is known as the ***Dreamthief Trilogy***. In itself, the novel is assured and elegant, a rich embroidery with enormous resonances for the reader well versed in the Multiverse. It can also act as a suitable entry point to Moorcock's mature work for readers who usually devour Penguin Classics instead of pulp S&S.

See also: *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*

Read on

Byzantium Endures; *Blood*; *Lunching with the Antichrist*

BRIAN MOORE (1921–99) IRELAND

THE GREAT VICTORIAN COLLECTION (1975)

Brian Moore, who was born and brought up in Ireland but lived most of his adult life in Canada, is not an immediately obvious candidate for inclusion in a guide to Fantasy fiction. His best-known work explores the personal anguish and unease of the lonely and the religiously tormented or delves back into the past to imagine the trials of faith of Roman Catholics threatened by secular realities. However, *The Great Victorian Collection* is a novel that, in its exploration of the liminal land between dream and reality, can take its place quite readily on anyone's fantasy bookshelves. Its central character is Maloney, a young professor of history, who falls asleep in a Californian motel and dreams of stalls of Victoriana magically appearing outside his window. When he wakes, he discovers that his dream of the night before has come true. The parking lot outside has indeed been filled with a collection of Victorian artefacts of all kinds from the most precious to the most mundane. He realises that 'he was not dreaming; he had really created these things and made them visible for others to see and admire'. How is Maloney to react? For a man professionally involved in the study of history, this sudden materialisation of articles from the past must surely be, in every sense of the phrase, a dream come true. Yet, as the media seize upon news of the collection, as it becomes a honeypot for antiquarians and novelty-seekers alike and is transformed into a tourist attraction, it becomes clear that it is just as much a nightmare.

The Great Victorian Collection is not a book that is typical of its author's oeuvre but it is an absorbing examination, in the form of a

fable or fantasy, of the problems we have when negotiating a path between appearance and reality.

Read on
Fergus; *The Mangan Inheritance*; *Cold Heaven*
Muriel Spark, *Memento Mori*

C.L. MOORE (1911–87) USA

BLACK GODS (aka JIREL OF JOIRY, aka 'BLACK GODS SHADOW', aka 'BLACK GODS KISS') (collected 1969)

Weird Tales was the king of the 1930s pulp magazines and its reigning queen was Catherine Moore. Working as a typist in a bank when she submitted the first of her 'Northwest Smith' SF stories to the magazine, Moore soon established herself as the first lady of modern genre fiction. In creating Jirel of Joiry in 1934, she launched the first ever female S&S icon. Going by the names of the characters and the mild courtliness of their settings, Jirel lives in what may be medieval France. Red-headed, yellow eyed, fearless, she is a kind of Joan of Arc figure, an armoured warrior woman who leads men into battle against interlopers and sorcerers who threaten Joiry. When her castle falls to Guillaume, who forces his attentions upon her, Jirel's ire blazes and, in no time, she has escaped imprisonment in her own dungeons. Descending a secret

tunnel beneath the castle, Jirel finds herself in another dimension. Removing the chain that holds her protective crucifix, she finds a means of defeating Guillaume – taking the Black God's kiss, she will pass it on to her enemy, only to find that what should be sweet revenge can be the bitterest draught of all.

Moore's stories are spattered with rainbow colour, creeping horrors and lush sensuality that more than hints at brooding female eroticism. Hallucinatory in their swimming tones, rippling with verdant, sometimes repetitious syntax, Moore's work is seminal weird fiction. Golden witch-panthers with violet eyes, naked dying dryads with ivory flesh and keeps peopled by the living dead are commonplaces in *Black Gods*. Psychedelic and swooning, Jirel's chronicle reveals her to be more than just a lady Conan, but a woman ready to step beyond the insane.

Omnibus Edition (most recent): *Black Gods and Scarlet Dreams* (UK)

See also: *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*

Read on

The Complete Northwest Smith; *The Dark World* (uncredited, written with her husband Henry Kuttner)

Leigh Brackett, *The Sword of Rhiannon*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *Lord of the Spiders*

WILLIAM MORRIS (1834–96) UK

THE WOOD BEYOND THE WORLD (1894)

William Morris was a man of prodigious and varied talents. As a craftsman and designer, he was one of the leading lights in the Arts and Crafts movements. As a poet, he wrote some of the most popular verse of the Victorian era. He was also a painter, a publisher and a polemicist for socialist and Marxist ideas. Amid all the other frenetic creative activity with which he filled his life he also found time to produce several narratives which can be counted among the founding texts of Heroic Fantasy. The best-known of these is probably *The Well at the World's End*, published in the last year of his life. *The Wood Beyond the World* appeared in print two years earlier and, in many ways, it points more clearly in the directions that fantasy literature was to travel in the next century. The hero of the story is Golden Walter, a young merchant who leaves his home to sail to foreign lands. Driven by a storm onto the shores of an unknown country, he travels into its interior and there encounters an enchantress who is holding a young maiden captive. His destiny, it soon becomes clear, is to fall in love with the maiden and rescue her but many trials await them before they gain freedom and happiness.

Morris was exceptionally well-read in Arthurian literature, medieval poetry and (unusually for an Englishman of his day) the Icelandic sagas. From these diverse sources of inspiration he created his own romances, written in his own version of the archaic prose he so admired. *The Wood Beyond the World* looks back to medieval literature but it is also the precursor of innumerable fantasies of more recent years which create worlds where magic and chivalry come together. It is not always

an easy book for modern readers to appreciate but its importance as a model which many later writers of fantasy fiction have echoed in their works is inarguable.

Read on

The House of the Wolflings; *The Story of the Glittering Plain*; *The Well at the World's End*

John Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River*; ›› J.R.R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*

HARUKI MURAKAMI (b. 1949) JAPAN

THE WIND-UP BIRD CHRONICLE (1994/1997)

Haruki Murakami is, by a long way, the most popular contemporary Japanese novelist both in his own country and in the West. His fiction is unmistakably Japanese but, with its endless references to 1960s music (particularly The Beatles), its adoption of motifs and ideas from American SF and crime writing and its borrowings from American movies and comic books, it also owes an enormous amount to Western pop culture. Although his work defies easy definition, many of his novels are best classified as Fantasy. *A Wild Sheep Chase*, for example, has as its central character a thirtysomething advertising man drawn into the quest for a sheep with the power to bestow immortality. In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the narrative

shifts, in alternate chapters, between a dystopian version of modern Tokyo and a strange walled town whose inhabitants have been separated from their shadows.

Toru Okada, the chief protagonist of the long and digressive *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, is a man who has opted out of the rat race of Japanese society. Content to live on the income of his magazine editor wife, he spends his days reading, cooking and pottering about their flat. Yet, when first his cat and then his wife disappear, Okada is drawn into a mad odyssey through an alternative Tokyo peopled by bizarre characters who may be real or may be just figments of his imagination. A precocious teenage neighbour shows him a dried-up well which appears to be a gateway into another world. Two psychic sisters visit him, first in his dreams and then in reality. An enigmatic sexual encounter with a woman in a hotel room leaves Okada with mysterious healing powers. A veteran of the Second World War recounts his dreadful experiences during that war. The mundane realities of Okada's everyday life are transformed into surreal revelations of his own half-acknowledged desires and of the hidden secrets of Japanese society.

Read on

A Wild Sheep Chase; *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

Michael Bishop, *Who Made Stevie Crye?*; Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Cavalier and Clay*; Walter Moers, *Rumo*

JOHN MYERS MYERS (1906–88) USA

SILVERLOCK (1949)

John Myers Myers began his writing career as a historical novelist and he also wrote a number of non-fiction works about the American West. However, his greatest achievement is a novel unlike almost anything else in the history of Fantasy literature. ***Silverlock*** is the story of A. Clarence Shandon, a twentieth-century Gulliver shipwrecked on the shores of a mysterious land known as The Commonwealth. Here he embarks on adventures which introduce him to many of the most famous characters from literature and legend, all of whom have their own reality in the Commonwealth. His companion on his travels is Golias, a wandering bard who saves his life and becomes Virgil to Shandon's Dante as he guides his bewildered visitor around a strange landscape. Shandon is a reluctant pilgrim at first, a practical and rather dull man who has had no time in his previous life for literature. However, as he makes his progress through The Commonwealth and encounters those who people it, he begins to change. Echoing the adventures of many of the literary figures he meets, his journey becomes one of self-discovery in which he comes face to face with the truth about his own nature. Given the name of Silverlock because of a streak of white in his hair, Shandon gradually becomes open to new possibilities. The whole of Myers's story is peppered with literary allusions (it becomes something of a challenge to spot them all) and his dramatis personae consists of a vast range of characters from books and mythology, ranging from Brian Boru and the Green Knight to Captain Ahab and Don Quixote. His hero finds himself at the centre of great works of the past, lurching into crucial scenes from Shakespeare

or the Mad Hatter's Tea Party. All of them are incorporated into a narrative that unobtrusively but very cleverly works to celebrate the pleasures of reading and the imagination.

Read on

The Moon's Fire-Eating Daughter

James Branch Cabell, *Jurgen*; John Connolly, *The Book of Lost Things*; Jasper Fforde, *The Eyre Affair*; Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

ROBERT NYE (b. 1939) UK

MERLIN (1978)

Of the making of Arthurian sagas, there is no end. The whole Avalonian thing has long run the risk of becoming tiresome and cliché-ridden. But one of the marks of a world-class writer is to find a fresh approach to an old story and make it palatable to even the most jaded of readers.

In his irreverent, poetic and elegant take on the mage's adventures in the court of King Arthur, Robert Nye's *Merlin* reinvigorates the most resonant British myth in a manner that would have made Shakespeare proud. Nye's chronicle of Camelot is scatological, lusty, absurd and scholarly. As both a low farce and a high historical novel its debt to both Elizabethan drama and Malory are undeniable, but this is not to decry the fact that this novel is a Fantasy. Narrated by Merlin himself (who claims to be the progeny of a virgin and a demon), in short staccato

sentences and paragraphs peppered with bad jokes, even worse puns and lashings of sparkling wit, this earthy and rapacious take on the great sorcerer's patronage of an often unlovable once and future King is both real literature and high comedy. Despite the dirty jests, this is fantasy humour well above the level of the often painfully adolescent pastiches to be found in the works of Pratchett's imitators.

A book that can be enjoyed by both the literati and the most anti-mainstream genre fan, ***Merlin*** may not be for starry-eyed purists, but it is for everyone who loves great writing. Robert Nye's fundamental vocation is that of poet, but at irregular intervals he produces novels based on historical or literary characters, sometimes in a serious vein, but often in a bawdy, satirical voice. Neither approach fails to entertain and enlighten. Nye consistently proves that the very best English writing need not be stuffy and dull, while educating his audience and inspiring them to read the original source works in which his borrowed protagonists appear.

Read on

Faust; *Falstaff*

›› John Brunner, *Father of Lies*; Peter Dickinson, *The Weathermonger*; Richard Monaco, *Parsival*

MERVYN PEAKE (1911–68) UK

TITUS GROAN (1946)

Series: *The Titus Books* aka *The Gormenghast Trilogy*

Born in China, the son of a missionary doctor and his wife, Mervyn Peake grew up to be one of the most versatile and least classifiable English writers and artists of the century whose work has gathered many admirers in the forty years since his death. The late 1940s were the most productive years of Peake's life. As an artist, he created memorable illustrations for a number of classics of English literature including *Treasure Island* and *Alice in Wonderland*. As a writer, he produced arguably the most important Secondary World Fantasy series ever, influencing generations of writers who succeeded him, either directly or indirectly (›› Harrison, ›› Miéville and ›› Moorcock are just three writers influenced by Peake). The ***Gormenghast*** books, set in the gloomy, gothic castle-citadel of the same name, were published at more or less the same time as *The Lord of the Rings*, the final volume appearing in 1959.

Peake's trilogy shares with Tolkien's work the sense of an entire imaginative universe created for readers to enter and enjoy, but its prose style is far more dense and arch, its storytelling less direct and stately of pace, its focus as much the inner landscape of the mind as the external wonders it depicts. *Titus Groan* introduces us to the vast baroque pile that is the ancestral home of the Earls of Groan. Inside the high, crumbling walls of the castle, characters with strange names like Prunesqallor, Barquentine and Muzzlehatch lead lives that are ruled by ancient and often incomprehensible ritual. An heir to the earldom, Titus Groan, has been born, but the enclosed society of Gormenghast is still

frozen in the past. However, change is about to come to the castle. The catalyst of this change is Steerpike, a malignant and Machiavellian kitchen boy who plots and schemes his way to power and, in doing so, sets in motion events that shake Gormenghast from its torpor.

The second two volumes of the trilogy follow the life of Titus Groan, still a baby at the end of the first book, as the fate determined for him by his inheritance and by Steerpike's ambition is slowly played out. With its weirdly unforgettable setting and its cast list of Dickensian eccentrics and monsters, the trilogy remains one of the indisputably great works of Fantasy.

Film version: *Gormenghast* (2000, TV mini-series based on the first two books in the trilogy)

Sequels: *Gormenghast*; *Titus Alone*; 'Boy in Darkness', from *Sometime Never* (ed. Kenyon Calthrop)

Read on

Mr Pye (Peake's only other completed novel is set on the island of Sark and follows the fortunes of a man who develops angels' wings when bringing good to the islanders and devils' horns when bringing them evil)

T.F. Powys, *Mr Weston's Good Wine*

TIM POWERS (b. 1952) USA

THE DRAWING OF THE DARK (1979)

Beer, glorious beer! It has been the inspiration for many a tall tale since time immemorial, the muse of exaggeration and invention. Fantasy figures often sip wine or ale, but surprisingly few of their creators have mined the gulf between sobriety and intoxication for their plots, other than to mock their protagonists in their cups or show how these manly fellows can hold their drink. But, in *The Drawing of the Dark*, beer proves to be central.

Sixteenth-century Irishman Brian Duffy is taking time out from the Crusades in Venice when he is hired by the Wizard Aurelianus to be a doorman at the Zimmerman Inn, a hostelry on the other side of the Alps, where the celebrated Herzwesten beer is exclusively served on draught. This is the kind of quest any hale swordsman can appreciate and Duffy sets off, falling in on his travels with a cadre of dwarfs and a hunchback and enduring various mishaps en route. Arriving in Vienna, he discovers that the nectar Aurelianus has been brewing, The Dark, has been sitting in its still for over three millennia. For The Dark is a magical ale of unique potency, fit only to be quaffed by one hero, the wounded Fisher King of legend – Arthur. Aurelianus is a Wizard in disguise, and to free his once and future King to lead Christendom against the might of the Turks, someone will have to be Arthur's proxy … and after all, Duffy likes a beer now and then.

Reading *The Drawing of the Dark* is like the invigorating refreshment to be relished when you sit at a pub table after coming in from the cold, an open fire roaring nearby. Balancing history and myth, wit and emotional depth, Powers is a master of mixing lightness of touch with

telling insight, of entertaining without insulting the intelligence. Another round of his tasty writing is always eagerly anticipated by fantasy connoisseurs.

Read on

The Stress of Her Regard

A.A. Attanasio, *Arthor*; ›› James Blaylock, *The Last Coin*; Charles De Lint, *Moonheart*; Ellen Kushner, *Swordspoint*

TERRY PRATCHETT (b. 1948) UK

THE COLOUR OF MAGIC (1983)

Series: *Discworld*

Terry Pratchett's Discworld is a planet travelling through space on the backs of four elephants. The four elephants themselves are standing on the back of a giant turtle named the Great A'Tuin. The biggest city on Discworld is Ankh-Morpork. Through the streets and taverns of Ankh-Morpork and the assorted other lands and townships that make up the Discworld swarm the hundreds of richly comic characters who enliven Pratchett's books. From an inept and cowardly wizard named Rincewind to Cohen the Barbarian, the greatest (and oldest) hero in the history of the planet, from the grumpy witch Granny Weatherwax to a former thief and con-man named Moist von Lipwig who ends up in charge of Ankh-Morpork's banking system, the inhabitants of Discworld form a mad and

hilarious cavalcade that tumbles past the delighted eyes of his readers.

In *The Colour of Magic*, the very first ***Discworld*** novel, Rincewind reluctantly takes the naive tourist Twoflower under his wing (together with his walking luggage and talking camera) and provides him with a guided tour of the dodgier and more dangerous areas of Ankh-Morpork and its environs. Driven from the city by a terrible fire, for which they may well bear some responsibility, Rincewind and Twoflower set off on a journey to the furthest limits of the Discworld and beyond. Pratchett began his series as amiable satire of the more absurd elements of Fantasy series but, over the years, it has expanded into an alternative universe that he seems capable of using for almost any narrative purpose he chooses. Philosophy, Hollywood, organised religion, the mysterious workings of the financial system and dozens of other subjects have come under Pratchett's scrutiny as he examines them through the distorting lens of the Discworld. And he does it in books that can make even the most jaded of readers laugh out loud. After more than twenty-five years of the Discworld, he remains the undisputed master of comic fantasy.

❑ **TV film:** *The Colour of Magic* (2008)

✍ **Sequels:** *The Light Fantastic*; *Equal Rites* and many others – for a full list of all the ***Discworld*** novels and associated books, see www.terrypratchettbooks.com

Read on

Truckers; *Diggers*; *Wings*
Mary Gentle, *Grunts*

READONATHEME: COMIC FANTASY

Robert Asprin, *Another Fine Myth*
Jack L. Chalker, *The River of Dancing Gods*
Jasper Fforde, *The Big Over Easy*
Craig Shaw Gardner, *A Malady of Magicks*
Andrew Harman, *The Sorcerer's Appendix*
The Harvard Lampoon, *Bored of the Rings*
Tom Holt, *Faust Among Equals*
Christopher Moore, *Practical Demonkeeping*
Robert Rankin, *The Antipope*
›› Roger Zelazny & Robert Sheckley, *Bring Me the Head of Prince Charming*

TERRY PRATCHETT (b. 1948) UK & NEIL GAIMAN (b. 1960) UK

GOOD OMENS (1990)

Good Omens takes films like *The Omen* and stories about impending Apocalypse and turns them into energetic comedy. The 'End Times' are upon us and a child has been born who is the anti-Christ, harbinger of the destruction of the world and the final judgement. The angel Aziraphale and the demon Crowley, who have become rather fond of

their comfortable lives in the material world, are saddened by news of its forthcoming annihilation and join forces to prevent it. They decide to keep an eye on the child who is destined to grow up to be the anti-Christ and steer him away from end-of-the-world activities. Unfortunately they pick the wrong child to watch. When the mistake is realised, the search is on for the real anti-Christ and the best guide is *The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch,* magnum opus of a seventeenth-century prophetess who ended her life burnt at the stake. Unfortunately, only one copy of Agnes Nutter's work survives.

At the time it was first proposed, the collaboration between Pratchett, already famous for the ***Discworld*** books, and Gaiman, then best known as a writer of dark storylines for graphic novels like *The Sandman*, may not have seemed an obvious recipe for success. In retrospect, it seems a marriage made in heaven. The particular comic strengths of both writers emerged when they chose to work together. Crammed with puns, parodies and odd ideas taken to ludicrous extremes, the book is a slapstick version of the Apocalypse, a narrative that proves silliness rather than solemnity may be the best response to the notion of the end of the world. Fans of both Pratchett and Gaiman can only mourn the fact that, despite persistent rumours of a sequel, *Good Omens*, with its unique perspective on Armageddon, is so far the only book to result from their collaboration.

Read on

Douglas Adams, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*; Piers Anthony, *On a Pale Horse*; Roald Dahl, *The Witches*; ›› Tanith Lee, *The Dragon Hoard*; ›› Sheri S. Tepper, *A Plague of Angels*

PHILIP PULLMAN (b. 1946) UK

NORTHERN LIGHTS (aka THE GOLDEN COMPASS) (1995)

Series: *His Dark Materials*

In the novels that make up Philip Pullman's trilogy, the author has constructed an alternative world where all humans have their own 'daemons', physical manifestations of their souls, which take the shape of animals and accompany them wherever they go. At the heart of its story is Lyra Belacqua, a young girl living in an Oxford that resembles the university city of our own world in some ways and is radically different from it in others. At the beginning of ***Northern Lights***, she is living in Jordan College, where she has been placed by Lord Asriel, a man she believes to be her uncle. It is there that she first hears rumours of strange events taking place in the Arctic North, of the mysterious substance called 'Dust' and of the bogeymen known as the 'Gobblers', child-snatchers who prowl the city streets in search of prey.

When her friend Roger disappears, apparently a victim of the Gobblers, Lyra embarks on a mission to rescue him which takes her first to London and then to the frozen North and involves the glamorous but villainous Mrs Coulter, a truth-telling compass which few but she can interpret, a Texan aeronaut named Lee Scoresby and Iorek Byrnison, a giant armoured bear of great honour and intelligence. By the end of the first volume in the trilogy, Lyra has failed to rescue Roger but she has learned more of who she is and the stage is set for even more mind-expanding adventures in the following books. Philip Pullman has been writing and publishing his fiction since the 1970s but none of his early works, successful though many of them were, prepared readers for the ambition and scope of ***His Dark Materials***. Drawing on an astonishing

range of sources, from classic literature and Norse mythology to particle physics and theology, Pullman has created one of the most intelligent, dramatic and compelling fantasies of modern times.

Film version: *The Golden Compass* (2007)

Sequels: *The Subtle Knife*; *The Amber Spyglass*; *Lyra's Oxford*; *Once Upon a Time in the North*

Read on
Galatea
Jeanne Duprau, *The City of Ember*; Jonathan Stroud, *The Amulet of Samarkand*

SIR HERBERT READ (1893–1968) UK

THE GREEN CHILD (1935)

There is a twelfth-century legend from Southern England which never fails to fascinate those who hear of it. There are at least two variations on the story, which tells of a pair of mysterious, green-skinned children who emerged from a fissure in the ground and perplexed the local populace. Confused and confounding, the children were adopted by a local knight. The boy child soon expired, but the girl survived, learned English and claimed to come from a subterranean realm of perpetual twilight.

Art critic Sir Herbert Read, a champion of Modernism and radical politics, adopted the myth for his only novel and shifted the action to the modern world. Read tells of Olivero, who leaves his rustic village birthplace to become a major figure in Latin American revolutionary circles. After thirty years of statecraft, dictatorship and warfare, Olivero returns home to discover that a Green Child, who appeared in his birthplace on the day he left for the New World, still survives, and lives with the taciturn mill-owner, Kneeshaw. Appalled by Kneeshaw's apparent cruelty towards the mermaid-like maiden, Olivero liberates her. The Green Child, vacant and becalmed, rewards Olivero by leading him underground into her strange, crystalline homeland, where the answer to her unknown origin may or may not be revealed.

Read's only novel, *The Green Child* is one of the most original, arresting and bewildering books ever written. Languid and non-sensational in its style, the sections of the book focusing on the Green Child are bewitching, while the lengthy middle segment concentrates pragmatically on the philosophical and political aspects of Olivero's career in statesmanship. This combination of blunt realpolitik and outright Fantasy makes *The Green Child* an unforgettable read, reminiscent of Latin American Magical Realism of the 1970s and 1980s, surrealism and utopian ideology. Simultaneously colourful and flat, this unique book provides a lifetime's worth of puzzlement for the reader who enjoys both interpreting metaphors and being pleasantly baffled.

Read on

Paul Auster, *Vertigo*; Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*; Richard Marsh, *The Beetle*; Edward Upward and Christopher Isherwood, *The Mortmere Stories*; Desmond Morris, *Inrock*

KEITH ROBERTS (1935–2000) UK

ANITA (collected 1970)

In the wake of TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed*, a whole new category of largely inconsequential supernatural novels marketed at teenage girls came to dominate the genre bestseller charts. Misleadingly known as Urban Fantasies (see the Glossary), these titles telling of high school romance featuring werewolves and vampires have transformed the market for traditional Horror fiction, weakening the grip of more established fear-mongers and their gorier, darker fantasies. There is nothing new under the moon, though. All trends have their precursors and Anita, the teenage witch whose escapades started appearing in 1964, has a fair claim to be the original Urban Fantasy heroine.

Anita lives in a cottage in the Northamptonshire countryside with her crusty old Granny, a traditional witch always complaining about the changes humans are making to the world. Tall, pretty, lissom, Anita is sure that she doesn't want to spend another million years shape-shifting and stopping time in the service of a Satan who is modernising his organisation so that it resembles a corporate business. Instead she steps out of the meadows to encounter ordinary boys with red sports cars, adorable vets and a supermarket checkout girl bullied by her peers. Filled with wonder at the weirdness of the mundane, Anita dreams of being an ordinary adolescent, but instead is often embroiled in the antics of ghosts, mermaids and a sea-serpent. Even her traditional spell-casting activities curry little favour with Granny, but then Anita's relatives are dull, apart from her visiting American cousin Ella Mae, who ensures that – for once – our heroine enjoys the simple pleasures of All Girls Together.

Keith Roberts is best known as a kind of SF equivalent of Thomas Hardy, magisterially evoking the poetry of the English landscape in accomplished post-apocalyptic novels. He was also noted for his facility with spirited and memorable female protagonists and ***Anita*** struck a chord with those who recognised their own blossoming post-feminist freedom in the young witch struggling with the temptations of a brave new world of girl power.

See also: *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*

Read on
Kaeti & Company; *Kaeti On Tour*; *The Chalk Giants*
›› Fritz Leiber, *Conjure Wife*; ›› Sheri S. Tepper, *Blood Heritage*

J.K. ROWLING (b. 1965) UK

HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE
(aka HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCEROR'S STONE) (1997)
In a little over ten years, J.K. Rowling has become one of the bestselling authors of all time. Her young wizard, Harry Potter, is now recognised around the world. Her books have sold hundreds of millions of copies and been translated into more than seventy languages. It seems entirely appropriate that the novel with which she first made her mark is a tale of magical transformations and hidden powers suddenly revealed.

When we are first introduced to our hero he is a nobody, living in dull suburbia with his relations, the Dursleys, in a house where he is made to feel unwelcome. Harry, of course, has secrets of which he knows nothing and it is not long before the poor relation has been whisked away from the Dursleys and despatched via Platform Nine and Three Quarters at King's Cross to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. There he makes new friends in Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley and an enemy in the bullying Draco Malfoy. He tests out his burgeoning skills as a wizard and learns just a little of the destiny which will eventually pit him against Lord Voldemort in a titanic struggle of good against evil.

Since the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, another six books in the series have appeared and Harry Potter has become a global success of the most astonishing kind. Everyone has now heard of Harry and his friends and of other characters like Professor Dumbledore and Hagrid. The rules of Quidditch may well be more familiar than those of cricket. It is almost impossible to separate the stories from the phenomenon but it is important to remember why the books have become so popular. They have done so largely because of Rowling's fertile inventiveness and the narrative skills which were on display from the very first chapter of the very first book.

Film version: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001)

Sequels: *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*; *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*; *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*; *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

Read on

Angie Sage, *Magyk* (first in the 'Septimus Heap' series)

READONATHEME: PRE-TEENAGE KICKS

Post-Potter fantastic reading for older children and young adults)

David Almond, *Skellig*
Trudi Canavan, *The Magician's Apprentice*
David Clement-Davis, *Fire Bringer*
Helen Dunmore, *Ingo*
›› Neil Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book*
F.E. Higgins, *The Black Book of Secrets*
Derek Landy, *Skulduggery Pleasant*
Garth Nix, *Sabriel*
Philip Reeve, *Here Lies Arthur*
Lemony Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*

GEOFF RYMAN (b. 1951) CANADA/UK

THE WARRIOR WHO CARRIED LIFE (1985)

When Cara's family is slaughtered and maimed by a family of usurpers who have claimed the power in her land, she vows revenge. Using forbidden magic, she transforms into a statuesque male warrior and embarks on a quest that will take her through various perilous realms, find her love and – just maybe – attain peace. Although the brief synopsis above reads like a typical amalgam of genre clichés, in the hands of Geoff Ryman such unpromising material is transformed alchemically from pulp base metals into literary gold. While ***The Warrior Who Carried Life*** features such things as dragons and living dead, it is set in an oriental-tinged place of rice paddies and exotic chinoiserie. Like an atmospheric Asian movie where Kurosawa and Ang Lee meet ›› Le Guin, this tale of flying swords and gender shift, shot through with moments of grotesque originality is a sensory delight. Proving that fantasy in the eighties wasn't all doorstop trilogies, the book was an ornate breath of fresh, blossom-tinctured mountain air at the time.

Ryman is a highly versatile author whose career started on this high note and has consistently improved. Author of the cult bestseller ***253*** (1998), which started as a series of stories about passengers on a tube train and was initially published online, Ryman has produced SF, general fiction and a remarkable meditation on Oz entitled ***Was***. His creative scope and compassion are undoubtedly attributable to his experiences. A gay Canadian who moved to the US at the age of eleven, relocating to Britain in 1973, Ryman was deeply moved by travels to Cambodia, an influence which clearly informs several of his novels.

Redemption, love, courage and peace inform his work, which is always thoughtful and unique.

Read on
The Unconquered Country
›› Peter S. Beagle, *The Innkeeper's Song*; ›› Tanith Lee, *The Birthgrave*; Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*

MICHAEL SHEA (b. 1946) USA

NIFFT THE LEAN (1982)

Nifft is not an honest man, but he is an honourable one. When a thief of his standing accepts a challenge, one thing is certain – that Nifft will do his very best. The results of Nifft's sterling efforts may not suit the ends of his paymasters every time, but they will certainly serve Nifft – if he can escape with his life. And there's the rub for, in Nifft's world, full of slimy and vengeful undead and gigantic subterranean insects, making a profit can be a secondary consideration. Luckily, Nifft's blade is as keen as his sabre-like wit. Otherwise, his erstwhile biographer Shag Margold, would have far shorter tales to recount than he does – yet in Margold's voice, the tallness of the stories themselves is implicit in the telling.

Michael Shea began his career with an officially sanctioned and well-received sequel to ›› Jack Vance's *The Eyes of the Overworld*, entitled

The Quest For Simbilis, continuing the saga of Cugel the Clever, a japester not unlike Nifft. But Shea proved he was no mere copyist with the Nifft novels, the first of which won the WFA. Loaded with garish colour, puckish humour, loathsome monsters and marvellously antiheroic swordplay, ***Nifft the Lean*** is for readers who favour originality over formula. At times as fleet and savoury as ›› Leiber, in other instances rich and satisfying as a king's banquet, Shea's S&S satisfies the sophisticated palate. Those who relish a frisson of horror and the seductive darkness of decadence to be found in ›› Clark Ashton Smith will also luxuriate in the Nifft books – so beware, for the opening incident of the saga, all wintry cold and reeking of betrayal is merely a foretaste of the nightmarish scrapes to come. Fortunately for the reader, Shea's inventiveness and flavoursome prose style also intensify as Nifft's saga rolls on.

✍ **Sequel:** *The Mines of Behemoth* (Omnibus Edition: *The Incompleat Nifft*); *The A'rak*

Read on

In Yana, The Touch of Undying; *Polyphemus*; *The Colour Out of Time* ›› Jack Vance, *Fantasms and Magics* (aka *Eight Fantasms and Magics*); ›› Fritz Leiber, *Bazaar of the Bizarre*

ROBERT SILVERBERG (b. 1935) USA

LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE (1980)

Series: *Majipoor*

On the huge, sunny planet of Majipoor, a vague-minded, golden-haired wanderer emerges from an envelope of warm mist. Unbothered by his amnesia, he falls in with a troupe of travelling jugglers comprising both humans and extraterrestrials, and our hero discovers a natural talent with balls and clubs. Soon besotted by the lithe Carabella, he is happy, except when troubling dreams hint at a past of great majesty. But the Coronal of Majipoor is the bearded dark-maned Valentine, not a street entertainer who just happens to share the same name. Or has the true ruler of this immense, rainbow world been secretly usurped without the knowledge of his fellows, the King of Dreams and the Pontifex? Should the hand governing Majipoor really be that of the lowly juggler?

As bright and delightful as the bubbles in a glass of pink champagne, *Lord Valentine's Castle* is a deceptively light Planetary Romance, a borderline Fantasy airily masquerading as SF. Although the book is set at least 15,000 years in the future in another world, the presence of alien sorcerers whose abilities are magical not biological places this elegant quest firmly in the Fantasy camp. The hierarchical structure of Majipoor's vividly realised, taxonomically diverse societies is reminiscent of epics like *Dune* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but has a delicate sturdiness of execution that makes the book a pleasant though sophisticated read. An effortless combination of fine literary stylistics and measured, dancing pulp adventure places the book somewhere between ›› Edgar Rice Burroughs and the medieval romances. The regal flavour of *Lord Valentine's Castle* will come as no surprise to

readers who have encountered the SF for which Silverberg is famous. If you are in search of entertainment that diverts, while still treating you as an adult, *Lord Valentine's Castle* offers both contentment and quality aplenty.

✍ **Sequels:** (initial trilogy): *Majipoor Chronicles*; *Valentine Pontifex* (for further information on later sequels, visit www.majipoor.com)

Read on

To the Land of the Living

›› Marion Zimmer Bradley, *Lythande*; Jacqueline Carey, *Kushiel's Dart*; Samuel R. Delany, *Tales of Neveryon*

CLARK ASHTON SMITH (1893–1961) USA

THE EMPEROR OF DREAMS (collected 2002)

Clark Ashton Smith was the kind of consciously poetic writer who, if he had to describe a mummy, would use the word 'cerements' rather than the more prosaic 'bandages'. Yet his often elaborate vocabulary was tempered by an ability to know how and when to use unusual words in a manner that sends readers into a vivid waking dreamland rather than into bored drowsiness. Smith's stories and verses (he produced no novels) are set in a parade of different fantasylands, all of them equally

fascinating. From medieval-tinged Averoigne, haunted by vampires and wizards, to the end-of-time venue of decay-shrouded Zothique, the last continent, Smith casts a moody light that illuminates these outré worlds momentarily and unforgettably. His gracefully flamboyant style is matched by effortless plotting, ensuring that his brief tales taste like *crème de menthe* and kick like absinthe. While he returns often to Averoigne and Zothique, unsettling visits to Hyperborea, Atlantis and Lovecraft's ***Cthulhu Mythos*** are also on Smith's itinerary.

A man seemingly out of his time, Smith began his literary career by winning a poetry prize, and then spent decades living in an isolated woodland cabin in California. This Thoreau of Dark Fantasy produced much of his work before the outbreak of World War II, the majority of it published in the legendary pulp magazine ***Weird Tales*** (where else?). *The Emperor of Dreams* collects his finest works, allowing the reader of today to rediscover this pioneer, whose romantic sensibilities and phosphorescent prose inspired so many giants of genre fiction to take up the pen.

Read on

William Hope Hodgson, *The Night Land*; Frank Belknap Long, *The Night of the Wolf*; Brian Lumley, *Hero of Dreams*; Arthur Machen, *The White People*; Colin Wilson, *Tomb of the Old Ones*

MICHAEL SWANWICK (b. 1950) USA

THE IRON DRAGON'S DAUGHTER (1993)

'The changeling's decision to steal a dragon and escape was born, though she did not know it then, the night the children met to plot the death of their supervisor.' The striking opening sentence of Michael Swanwick's remarkable hybrid of steampunk and dystopic fantasy provides readers with an immediate taste of the dark imaginings to come. Jane is a young labourer-cum-prisoner in a factory building mechanical dragons for combat. Melanchthon is a rusting dragon destined for the scrapheap. When Jane comes across a grimoire that holds the secret of the dragons' sentience, she learns how to take control of Melanchthon and escape with him from the confines of the factory. However, the world in which they end up holds as many dangers as the Dickensian nightmare from which they have fled. Melanchthon's power is soon exhausted once they escape and, like some beached metallic leviathan, he reverts to a state of torpor. Jane is forced to confront the peculiar horrors of a high school and university life where the Prom Queen is cast onto a sacrificial bonfire and flunking out can be fatal. As she falls deeper and deeper into a world where violence, magic and twisted technology are all mixed together, the megalomaniac plans of a reviving Melanchthon seem to offer another chance for escape but one which may demand the most terrible of prices.

Michael Swanwick began to publish his SF stories in the 1980s and he was initially identified with the Cyberpunk writers of that decade. However, throughout his career, he has resisted any attempts to

pigeonhole him and each of his novels has had its own particular originality. *The Iron Dragon's Daughter*, often described as a kind of 'anti-fantasy' inasmuch as Swanwick uses it to overturn most of our expectations of what a Fantasy novel might be, is one of his most darkly daring and inventive works of fiction.

Read on

The Dragons of Babel (set in the same world as *The Iron Dragon's Daughter*); *Jack Faust* (a modern take on the Faust legend)
Ekaterina Sedia, *The Alchemy of Stone*

SHERI S. TEPPER (b. 1929) USA

BEAUTY (1991)

The novel begins in fourteenth-century England (or an alternate version of it) as Beauty, teenage daughter of the Duke of Westfaire, puts quill to paper to record her life in the picturesque castle that is her home. What readers are given for the first pages of Sheri S. Tepper's remarkable work is a funny and knowing version of the Sleeping Beauty story but it soon develops into something much more. Far from falling into a hundred-year-long sleep, Beauty is propelled forwards in to the future (a century or so after our own time) and here she finds a society where the concept that provides her name has been almost entirely forgotten.

The world has become a dystopia and the people who inhabit it have been brutalised by their surroundings. Beauty cannot wait to escape this future and she succeeds in doing so, only to find herself pursued into the past by her experiences there. For the rest of the novel, we follow Beauty as she moves between her own, medieval world, the world of faerie and the world of the future.

Sheri S. Tepper has long been one of the most versatile feminist writers in the field of speculative fiction and her work has ranged from a sequence of interrelated trilogies set among shape-shifting beings in the so-called Lands of the True Game to post-apocalyptic SF (*The Gate to Women's Country* is a powerful story set in an eco-friendly, matriarchy where men have been banished to the periphery of society.) *Beauty*, perhaps her most ambitious novel, encompasses the retelling of fairy tales (Snow White, Cinderella and others find their places in the plot), an exploration of the interaction between magic and reality and a melancholy acknowledgement of the decline of the beauty which gives a name to both book and heroine.

Read on

King's Blood; *The Song of Mavin Manyshaped*; *Jinian Footseer* (the opening novels of the three trilogies which make up ***The True Game***); *Singer from the Sea*

Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*; Jane Yolen, *Briar Rose*

J.R.R. TOLKIEN (1892–1973) UK

Series: *Middle Earth*

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, the son of an English bank manager, but was brought back to England when he was only three years old and spent most of his childhood in the countryside near Birmingham. He was studying at Oxford when the First World War broke out and, after graduation, he volunteered for military service. He fought at the Battle of the Somme and was, unsurprisingly, profoundly affected by his experiences in the war and by the loss of many close friends. After the war ended, he worked briefly on the Oxford English Dictionary before entering academic life as first a reader and then a professor of English Language at the University of Leeds. He returned to Oxford in 1925 and remained there for the rest of his working life.

Tolkien spent his days immersed in the study of language, literature and mythology. The results of that study were not only academic works like the standard edition of the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and hugely important essays on Anglo-Saxon poems such as *Beowulf*, but also *The Hobbit*, the vast saga entitled *The Lord of the Rings* and the numerous other chronicles of ***Middle Earth*** that were Tolkien's private pastime. They became the most critically acclaimed, enduringly popular, seminally influential and commercially successful books in the history of Fantasy per se and are the definitive works of the High Fantasy sub-genre. Only published in three volumes as it was too long to be bound as a singleton (thus sparking an unending trend for multi-part imaginative novels), *LOTR* always claims the number one position in any public vote for 'Best Novel'. As Tolkien's

Middle Earth writings were vast, complex in terms of internal chronology and are still in the process of being published, we recommend visiting www.tolkien.co.uk for updated bibliographical details.

THE HOBBIT (1937)

'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.' So begins one of the most popular children's books ever published. Tolkien wrote the story for his own amusement and the entertainment of his children in the early 1930s, although it took its place in the invented mythology he had been constructing for at least a decade before that. It might have remained unpublished but for the fact that it came to the attention of the publisher Stanley Unwin who, so the story goes, gave it to his ten-year-old son Rayner to read. When Rayner gave it an enthusiastic thumbs-up, Unwin took steps to ensure that *The Hobbit* should appear under his publishing imprint of George Allen & Unwin. Since then, apart from a very brief period during the Second World War when it fell foul of paper shortages, the book has never been out of print. It is the story of Bilbo Baggins, the hobbit mentioned in its very first sentence. Hobbits are diminutive creatures, half the height of humans, who lead comfortable lives amid the fields of the Shire. Bilbo, like most of his kind, is a lover of home and its comforts but when the wizard Gandalf comes calling, he finds himself tricked into a dangerous journey to confront the dragon Smaug that will take him far away from them.

The Hobbit is a classic 'quest' story which has won over generations of children with its charm and its easy readability. It also carries within it the seeds of Tolkien's vastly more ambitious work *The Lord of the Rings*. In the course of his adventures Bilbo meets with a troglodytic creature named Gollum and wins from him a magic ring. When Stanley

Unwin began to ask Tolkien about the possibility of a follow-up to ***The Hobbit***, the author's mind returned to that ring. The rest was history.

Read on

Farmer Giles of Ham; *Smith of Wootton Major*
Roald Dahl, ***James and the Giant Peach***; Brian Jacques, ***Redwall***

THE LORD OF THE RINGS (THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING; THE TWO TOWERS; THE RETURN OF THE KING) (1954–55)

Set in the fantasy lands of Middle-Earth, ***The Lord of the Rings*** chronicles the struggle for possession of the One Ring and its powers and the on-going confrontation between the forces of good and the forces of evil in Middle-Earth. Frodo Baggins is the book's protagonist, kinsman to Bilbo Baggins from ***The Hobbit***, who inherits the Ring from Bilbo and sets in motion the book's plot. The Ring, created by the Dark Lord Sauron in ages gone by, is a threat to goodness and freedom throughout Middle-Earth and the quest to destroy it on which Frodo is launched involves nearly everyone in Tolkien's enormous *dramatis personae* of men, hobbits, elves, dwarves, orcs and other races.

In the fifty years since the books appeared, many other authors have followed in his path and written epic works of High Fantasy but Tolkien outclasses all his imitators. He does so not so much because of his plot (the simple and morally explicit battle between good and evil is easy to replicate) as thanks to his teeming imagination. Drawing on his own encyclopedic knowledge of such subjects as Norse mythology, Anglo-Saxon literature and medieval philology, he gave his invented world complete systems of language, history, anthropology and geography.

The sense of an entirely coherent but imaginary universe is remarkable and unsurpassable. It is difficult to over-estimate the influence, not always for the good, Tolkien has had on fantasy fiction. *The Lord of the Rings* stands as the founding text of modern Fantasy. In the half-century since it appeared, countless imitators and admirers have produced fiction which draws heavily upon it; others have disliked it and very deliberately created their worlds in reaction to Middle-Earth. For both its millions of admirers, and its rather smaller number of detractors, *The Lord of the Rings* remains unique.

Film version: *The Lord of the Rings* (1978, animation, with a script co-written by ›› Peter S. Beagle); *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003, three-part movie version directed by Peter Jackson)

Read on

The Silmarillion

John Bellairs, *The Face in the Frost*; Dennis L. McKiernan, *The Iron Tower*; Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (the first of the lengthy 'Dragonlance' series based on 1980s role-playing games which draw heavily on Tolkien-like themes and motifs)

JACK VANCE (b. 1916) USA

THE DYING EARTH (collected 1950)

The sun is a dull red, the sky a deep mazarine blue. Earth is elderly, but still inhabited by people who live each day vigorously, for soon, the planet – and they – will die. Taking stylistic cues from the swooning, drunken tone of ›› C.L. Moore and the rich shadow-winds of ›› Clark Ashton Smith, Jack Vance's *Dying Earth* chronicles tell of the most ornate and picaresque beings of these final days, the Wizards and their Homunculi, whose paths cross and interweave like the silken webs of rainbow arachnids. Always seeking a favour in return for their wisdom, these mages of the distant future employ vivid sorceries, muttering incantations and coveting talismans, wielding magics that resemble nigh-forgotten sciences, including the lost art of mathematics.

The Dying Earth is the first of four supernal fantasies that spawned this definitive sub-genre of Science Fantasy, painting declining lands rife with multi-hued phantasms. These subtly meshing stories of the master Wizards of the future give way to the adventures of the mercurial trickster Cugel the Clever in the second and third books in the sequence, dazzling examples of Vance's inventive command of language, at once archaic, eloquent and sardonic, that has made him the envy of writers working within and outside the genre. If Shakespeare or Cervantes had been resurrected in the twentieth century, this is the quality of Fantasy they would have produced.

Jack Vance has enjoyed a long and illustrious career as an author after spending time at University and in the Navy. Adept also at SF and Crime fiction, Vance wrote Planetary Romances which are the gold

standard of that form. His Fantasies possess majestic sweep and pyrotechnic wordplay that leave his competitors (and his substantial cult following) gasping with astonishment. A major figure in imaginative literature whose importance matches that of ›› Tolkien, ›› Moorcock and ›› Howard, Vance would be globally famous if mainstream literary critics were more cosmopolitan in their reading.

✍ **Sequels:** *The Eyes of the Overworld*; *Cugel's Saga*; *Rhialto the Marvellous* (Omnibus Edition: *Tales of the Dying Earth*)

Read on

Lyonesse; *The Green Pearl*; *Madouc*

›› Michael Shea, *A Quest For Simbilis* (an authorised variant sequel to *The Eyes of the Overworld*); ›› Roger Zelazny, *Jack of Shadows*

T.H. WHITE (1906–64) UK

THE SWORD IN THE STONE (1938)

T.H. White was a versatile and imaginative English writer whose works range from *The Age of Scandal*, an excursion through eighteenth-century history, to *The Goshawk*, a minor classic of natural history writing which chronicles the relationship between falcon and falconer. Several of his books fall into the category of Fantasy literature in its broadest definition. *Mistress Masham's Repose* is a delightful

children's book in which a young orphan discovers some descendants of Swift's Lilliputians living in the grounds of her house. *The Elephant and the Kangaroo* records the events of a second Noah's Flood which takes place in Ireland. However, his greatest work of fantasy fiction by far and the book by which he will long be remembered is *The Once and Future King*, his ambitious re-telling of Arthurian legends. This began life in 1938 with *The Sword in the Stone*, a story of the young Arthur (known as Wart) and his adventures with the magician Merlyn. Over the years, White published other short Arthurian books and, eventually, after revising these earlier books and adding new material, he published *The Once and Future King* as an omnibus edition in 1958.

Sly humour and anachronism are prominent in White's re-telling, particularly in the early volumes of the sequence, but the tone necessarily deepens and darkens as the story unfolds. As White moves from the escapades of the young Arthur through his ascent to kingship and the creation of the Round Table to the destructive passion of Lancelot and Guinevere and the climactic confrontation between good and evil that destroys the ideal kingdom of Camelot, he refashions the familiar tales with wit and poignancy. The Arthurian legends have an archetypal power that has invited many writers over the centuries to re-tell them but, in the 20th century, nobody did so with such imagination and originality as T.H. White.

Film version: *The Sword in the Stone* (1963, Disney animation)

Read on

The Book of Merlyn (White's final work of Arthurian fantasy, published posthumously); *Mistress Masham's Repose*

Thomas Berger, *Arthur Rex*; Sir Thomas Malory, *Morte D'Arthur*; John Steinbeck, *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*

READONATHEME: ARTHURIAN FANTASY

A.A. Attanasio, *The Dragon and the Unicorn*
Gillian Bradshaw, *Hawk of May*
Peter Dickinson, *Merlin Dreams*
Stephen Lawhead, *Taliesin*
Naomi Mitchison, *To the Chapel Perilous*
Fred Saberhagen, *Merlin's Bones*
Mary Stewart, *The Crystal Cave*
Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Coming of the King*
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*
›› Jack Vance, *Lyonesse*

CHARLES WILLIAMS (1886–1945) UK

THE WAR IN HEAVEN (1930)

The Inklings were a group of Oxford University writers who met regularly in a pub in the city to discuss their interest in Fantasy. Most famous of their number were ›› Tolkien and ›› C.S. Lewis, whose devotees often forget their fellow Christian Inkling Charles Williams. His work remains sadly neglected by comparison.

The War In Heaven is written in the genteel English detective story style of its period. Beginning typically with the discovery of a corpse beneath the desk of a publisher specialising in the occult, the narrative soon begins to take a supernatural turn when villainous author Sir Giles Tumulty uses the publisher's son as his instrument to obtain the Holy Grail, which is residing unrecognised in a small parish church. But Archdeacon Julian Davenant is ready to oppose Tumulty, whose designs on the one true cup of Christ are far from reverent. The evil ones intend to storm the gates of Heaven itself, but the wily Davenant is determined to stand in the way of the obscene assault.

Possibly an influence upon ›› M. John Harrison's later work, this blend of mild horror, Christian mysticism and middle class body-in-the-library thriller works as an excellent introduction to the oeuvre of this important Fantasy writer. Succeeded by more difficult, allegorical works that tackle various metaphysical Fantasy archetypes, *The War in Heaven* is one of the great Holy Grail novels that nonetheless provides a useful insightful into Williams's theological concerns. Curious, arguably more mature than the works of his fellow Inklings, Williams' fantasies may be of their time in style, but are weighty and thoughtful in their content. An editor at Oxford University Press, Williams was also

a literary critic, poet and non-fiction author. Regarded as a literary Renaissance man by his peers, his idiosyncratic novels deserve the attention of all serious fantasy readers.

Read on

In the Place of the Lion; *Descent into Hell*

Humphrey Carpenter, ***The Inklings*** (non-fiction); ›› C.S. Lewis, ***Till We Have Faces***; ›› J. R. R. Tolkien, ***Tree and Leaf*** (non-fiction)

TAD WILLIAMS (b. 1956) USA

THE DRAGONBONE CHAIR (1988)

Series: *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn*

Robert Paul 'Tad' Williams marched to the top of the Fantasy bestseller charts in the late 1980s with the publication of ***The Dragonbone Chair***, the first volume in what was to become a trilogy known collectively as 'Memory, Sorrow and Thorn'. On one level, the book is a relatively conventional Fantasy epic, albeit one which demonstrates a high degree of imagination and inventiveness. Set in the land of Osten Ard, it tells the story of Simon, a kitchen boy turned magician's apprentice who is obliged to embark upon a journey which takes him to the heart of the struggle between two brothers for the throne of the kingdom. The future of the land and the question of whether or not it will revert to the rule

of the elvish Sithi depends on the contest between the two princes. All the classic elements of such Fantasy writing are there, from trolls and elves and giants to swords of power and the archetypal clash of the forces of good and evil.

There is little in *The Dragonbone Chair* or in its sequels that will come as a surprise to the seasoned reader of Fantasy. However, Williams gives familiar material his own very individual stamp with the power of his storytelling and the vigour of his characterisations. The book, and the trilogy of which it is part, use classic Fantasy themes and motifs but they use them very well indeed. In the twenty years since he first came to readers' attentions with *The Dragonbone Chair*, Williams has continued to produce bestselling works, including further sequences (***Otherland*** is a series of novels, more SF than Fantasy, set in a near-future world where the virtual and the real are intertwined), stand-alone novels and comic books which provide his interpretations of classic superheroes. However, the original novel of the trilogy remains the best introduction to his imaginative world.

✍ **Sequels:** *Stone of Farewell*; *To Green Angel Tower*

Read on

Otherland: City of Golden Shadow

Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind*; Robert E. Vardeman & Victor Milan, *The War of Powers*

GENE WOLFE (b. 1931) USA

PEACE (1975)

Gene Wolfe is best known for his tetralogy, 'The Book of the New Sun'. *The Shadow of the Torturer*, the first volume of this epic enterprise in imaginative literature, won the World Fantasy Award in 1981 but, like the entire work, it is actually SF (or possibly a 'Dying Earth' Science Fantasy). However, one of Wolfe's strengths as a writer is his ability effortlessly to cross arbitrary boundaries of genre and it is thus difficult to choose just one novel to exemplify his major contribution to fantasy fiction.

Peace was an early work but it remains probably the most original and disorienting narrative he has written. The character who provides it is Alden Dennis Weer, a rich recluse, who seems at first to be doing no more than recalling his life in a small American town in the first half of the twentieth century. He tells of outings into the countryside with his Aunt Olivia and her assorted suitors, he conjures up images of Christmases long gone and a childhood spent in a vanished world. From Weer's recollections, other stories emerge. One of Olivia's admirers recounts a bizarre meeting with a man whose flesh was turning to stone; the diary of a nineteenth-century resident of the town is discovered and seems to contain a record of treasure buried by the famous Civil War guerrilla William Quantrill. However, Wolfe is a devious storyteller and there is more to Weer and the tales of his life than first seems. The stories within stories are deceptive, more often lies and fantasies than factual accounts. Weer himself may well be nothing more than a ghost, frantically inventing a past that might or might not have existed. *Peace* is a treacherous and confusing novel, an immensely clever collection of fragments which, while never quite cohering into a

whole, reveals how we can only hope to make any sense of our lives by telling stories.

Read on
There Are Doors; *The Wizard Knight* (a two-volume fantasy in which a teenager is transported from our world to a multi-levelled new reality) Jeffrey Ford, *The Portrait of Mrs Charbuque*

VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882–1941) UK

ORLANDO (1928)

Orlando is a 'biography' of its eponymous subject, except that unlike other men, Orlando is no mere mortal, nor is he always male. We first encounter him in the Elizabethan age, becoming acquainted and intrigued by this sometimes bold, sometimes fey, but always engagingly indolent being. On occasion drifting off into coma, this irresistible sleeping beauty awakens in another age, changing sex spontaneously, partaking of transvestism and sapphism, bestriding the centuries. Spending hir time falling in love, luxuriating in rich surroundings, always decadent and ever indulgent, Orlando sweeps fancifully from scene to salon, from affair to assignation, eternal and unchanging only in hir ever-shifting identity. Although the social curtain that falls behind Orlando's delicate transgressions alters from Arcadia to Metropolis as Europe is modernised, the weave of the tapestry remains exquisite in its detail.

Orlando is not so much a novel as an exercise in fine writing. It is episodic and incidental rather than plot-driven, so much like our own lives. As a celebration of beauty, it may be precious and at times even fluffy, but it is nonetheless a consummate work of art, its prose perfectly crafted. Arguably an influence upon ›› Michael Moorcock's ***Cornelius*** series in its gender-bending and defiance of conventional structure, *Orlando* is also an icon of transgender fiction. Too little read by Fantasy fans, it is a pioneering work of the imagination.

To an extent, *Orlando* is an avatar of (and tribute to) Woolf's sometime lover, fellow writer Vita Sackville-West. A celebrated literary modernist, Woolf was part of the set of upper middle-class aesthetes known as the Bloomsbury Group. Usually working in a stream-of-consciousness mode, Woolf is often portrayed as a feminist equivalent of James Joyce. Although she is regarded as an icon of women's realist psychological writing, *Orlando* (her only Fantastic work) has a claim to being her most accessible and appealing book.

Film version: *Orlando* (1992, with Tilda Swinton in the title role)

Read on

Peter Ackroyd, *The House of Dr Dee*; ›› Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*; Giorgio De Chirico, *Hebdemeros*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *Gloriana*; Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, *Ariosto*

AUSTIN TAPPAN WRIGHT (1883–1931) USA

ISLANDIA (1942)

Austin Tappan Wright was a lawyer and academic who held professorships at a number of American universities and was killed in a car crash before he reached the age of fifty. In his own lifetime he published only the one work of fiction – '1915', a short story about the testing of an ordinary man's patriotism in the face of a foreign invasion which appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in the year that provided the title. However, after his death, it was discovered that Wright had spent most of his life working on a vast work of Utopian fiction. In an edited version, it was published as ***Islandia*** eleven years after his death. The title of the book is the same as the nation in which it is set. Islandia is a country that occupies part of a fictional land-mass which Wright sets in the Southern hemisphere close to Antarctica. The book, in its published form, opens at Harvard University in 1901. The novel's protagonist, John Lang meets a fellow freshman, Dorn, who turns out to be an inhabitant of the mysterious Islandia. Lang is intrigued by Dorn and his country. He learns the Islandian language and, after graduation, as one of the few Americans who can speak it, he is appointed consul to the distant land. Through Lang's eyes, we are introduced to life in Islandia. Compared to the civilisation he has left behind, his new home is technologically primitive but it has its own strengths. Islandians have a much more sophisticated understanding of human emotions and sexuality than early twentieth-century Americans and, in important ways, its society is freer and more satisfying. In the end, Lang decides that the arcadian, humane pleasures he discovers in this foreign world have more to offer than the modernity of his own country and he throws in his lot with the

Islandians. The circumstances in which *Islandia* was written were remarkable; the utopian vision its creator provides is equally unusual.

Read on

The Islar (a novel by Mark Saxton, the man who edited Wright's work for publication, set in the same world); Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*; Aldous Huxley, *Island*

ROGER ZELAZNY (1937–95) USA

NINE PRINCES IN AMBER (1972)

After Corwin awakens from a coma with amnesia, he immediately escapes from the hospital in which he has been kept under sedation. Although not out of place in contemporary America, Corwin realises he is no ordinary man. He discovers that the answer to the riddle of his past lies in a deck of tarot-like cards that depict a gallery of individuals he recognises as siblings. His memory returning, Corwin deceives those around him with arch statements and knowing asides, as the figures from the cards gradually reveal themselves to him as foes or partners. Corwin's deception will lead him to Amber, the ultimate, eternal city, the seat of power on the true Earth, besides which all other places are merely shadows cast by original forms now lost in Chaos. As cards are turned, Corwin makes alliances and threats, scheming to invade Amber with an army of beings from other planes, eager to prevent an infernal

coronation. In Amber, there are no villains or heroes, only sides.

Corwin is strikingly antiheroic, vengeful, sarcastic and confident, like most of the narrators of Zelazny's award-winning SF. In *Nine Princes in Amber* Zelazny turned to S&S for the first time, never using clichéd words like 'spell' or 'enchantment' in his text, relying instead on direct wordplay and his readers' assumptions about the nature of the action to instil magic into Amber. This bitter saga of swordplay and treachery is fast-moving and unburdened by the cod-medieval pomp that afflicts so many dynastic fantasy series. Zelazny's terse style uses contemporary parlance without undermining Amber's romantic nature, revealing an understanding of the universal relevance of fantasy storytelling that undoubtedly stems from his degree in Jacobean/ Elizabethan drama. For readers who cannot stomach the turgid excesses of courtliness in the kind of fantasy overly-influenced by Arthurian tales, *Amber* is welcome relief, proving that brevity is the soul of intrigue.

See also: *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*

Sequels/Omnibus Editions: *The Chronicles of Amber* (collects the first *Amber* quintet of *Nine Princes in Amber*; *The Guns of Avalon*; *The Sign of the Unicorn*; *The Hand of Oberon*; *The Courts of Chaos*) and *The Great Book of Amber* (collecting all ten *Amber* novels)

Read on

Changeling

John M. Ford, *The Dragon Waiting*; ›› Michael Moorcock, *The Jewel in the Skull*; Joanna Russ, *Picnic on Paradise*; ›› Charles Williams, *The Greater Trumps*

THE WORLD FANTASY AWARD FOR BEST NOVEL

The WFAs have been presented annually at the World Fantasy Convention since 1975 and are decided by a panel of judges. The main award is for best novel, but there are other prizes for shorter fiction, anthologies, artists and so on. The award is noted for its broad scope and facility for selecting winners from areas of publishing outside genre fantasy (it should be noted that SF, Horror and books by authors of mainstream fiction sometimes win the WFA), so it is of great interest to readers of all kinds of fiction. The WFAs are the most coveted awards for Fantastic fiction alongside the Hugo and Nebula awards for SF. The British Fantasy Society also gives an annual prize for best novel, known as the August Derleth Award, but this is primarily given to writers of horror and dark fantasy.

1975 ›› Patricia McKillip, *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*
1976 Richard Matheson, *Bid Time Return*
1977 William Kotzwinkle, *Doctor Rat*
1978 ›› Fritz Leiber, *Our Lady of Darkness*
1979 ›› Michael Moorcock, *Gloriana*
1980 ›› Elizabeth A. Lynn, *Watchtower*

1981 ›› Gene Wolfe, T*he Shadow of the Torturer*
1982 ›› John Crowley, *Little Big*
1983 ›› Michael Shea, *Nifft The Lean*
1984 John M. Ford, *The Dragon Waiting*
1985 ›› Robert Holdstock, *Mythago Wood*
1986 Dan Simmons, *The Song of Kali*
1987 Patrick Suskind, *Perfume*
1988 ›› Ken Grimwood, *Replay*
1989 Peter Straub, *Koko*
1990 ›› Jack Vance, *Lyonesse: Madouc*
1991 James Morrow, *Only Begotten Daughter*
1992 Robert R. McCammon, *A Boy's Life*
1993 ›› Tim Powers, *Last Call*
1994 Lewis Shiner, *Glimpses*
1995 James Morrow, *Towing Jehovah*
1996 Christopher Priest, *The Prestige*
1997 Rachel Pollack, *Godmother Night*
1998 Jeffrey Ford, *The Physiognomy*
1999 Louise Erdrich, *The Antelope Wife*
2000 Martin Scott, *Thraxas*
2001 ›› Tim Powers, *Declare*
2002 ›› Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Other Wind*
2003 Graham Joyce, *The Facts of Life*
2004 Jo Walton, *Tooth and Claw*
2005 ›› Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*
2006 ›› Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*
2007 ›› Gene Wolfe, *Soldier of Sidon*
2008 ›› Guy Gavriel Kay, *Ysabel*

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF FANTASY TERMS

*indicates a separate glossary entry, to enable cross-referencing

Cthulhu Mythos This is the collective term applied to stories written by ›› H.P. Lovecraft and his followers, sharing a common cosmology that is sometimes interpreted as Fantasy, sometimes as SF.

Dark Fantasy Also known as Supernatural Horror*, this is the category of Horror* comprising stories using the Fantasy elements of magic/the supernatural to create its scares, as opposed to Science Fiction or Crime elements.

Fabulation A literary term for Fantastic* fiction produced by writers from the literary Mainstream*, usually in a highly self-conscious manner that indicates the writer is playing games with the idea of fiction itself, often using the reader's knowledge and expectations of other stories. Fabulations often expand on or examine existing stories from other angles, such as ›› John Gardner's *Grendel*.

Fantastic, The The main body of fiction besides Realism, The Fantastic (or Romance*) contains both Fantasy, Supernatural Horror* and Science Fiction, as well as cross-genre forms such as Science Fantasy* and Steampunk*.

Genre Fantasy We use this term to distinguish between books that are category-labelled as 'Fantasy' by their publishers and those that are not labelled such by their publishers, even when these latter books (which we call Mainstream Fantasy*) are clearly not realistic fiction. Fantasy stories that were first published in pulp/genre magazines are also by definition Genre Fantasies.

Heroic Fantasy *See* **Sword and Sorcery**

High Fantasy A variant of Sword and Sorcery* that arguably arose from outside Genre Fantasy*, in the form of *The Lord of the Rings*. Although High Fantasy shares the same content symbols as S&S (wizards, swordsmen etc), it is distinguishable only from the latter by the high stakes of the conflict depicted – the very nature or future existence of the world will be changed by the outcome of the action.

Horror A cross-genre marketing category of fiction (as opposed to a distinct, content-based genre) focusing tonally and stylistically on the human fear of death (and any afterlife consequences) and concerns about the frailty of our bodies. Numerous SF, Fantasy and Crime novels/stories can be categorised as Horror for commercial purposes and are marketed as such. Horror stories involving magic/the supernatural are known as Dark Fantasy*

Mainstream The main body of general fiction written and published outside genre conventions and genre markets, commonly regarded as more serious and accomplished by the majority of literary critics and general readers without firsthand experience of genre fiction.

Mainstream Fantasy Fantasies issued and marketed as general fiction,

not labelled 'Fantasy' by their publishers, or Fantasies written by authors who work predominantly outside genre fiction markets.

Planetary Romance A subgenre of SF* arguably invented by ›› Edgar Rice Burroughs, set on colourful alien planets, often containing symbols common in Sword and Sorcery*, such as swords themselves.

Pulp Magazines The popular mass-market American magazines that appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, printed on cheap paper. The pulps showcased and separated popular fiction into the different genre categories we recognise today, encouraging publishers to market and label certain books as Fantasy, Science Fiction, Crime and so on, thus creating the concept of Genre Fiction.

S&S *See* **Sword and Sorcery**

Secondary Worlds Stories set in worlds other than our own, which make either no reference to our world (or do not confirm they are set in our world), or in which the connection between our world and the secondary world is not explained scientifically. Secondary Worlds which are scientifically explicable (such as Alternate Histories, where, for example, the outcome of a war or an assassination leads to a different history for our planet) are Science Fiction, not Secondary World fantasies.

Science Fantasy A broad term used to encapsulate those ambiguous stories which are difficult to confirm either as Science Fiction or Fantasy, due to the fact that the author does not unequivocally confirm that the magic referred to in the text is actually advanced science, while hinting strongly that it may be. Typical examples of these genre-straddling books are the *Hawkmoon* novels (›› Michael Moorcock) and the *Dying Earth* (›› Jack Vance).

Science Fiction/SF Science Fiction is the literature that suggests the significant, scientifically explicable changes that may potentially occur in the sphere of human knowledge and experience, exploring how those changes might affect human minds, bodies and culture, but that have not occurred at the time of writing. SF authors justify these changes to our worldview in their stories using scientific (or scientific-sounding) terminology as explanations. The presence of magic/the supernatural in a story immediately indicates that it is cannot be SF, but that it must be Fantasy instead. Stories set in Secondary Worlds* – self contained or accessible from our own – which are not explained 'scientifically' by their author are also Fantasy, not SF.

Steampunk A term coined by K.W. Jeter to describe stories set predominantly in Victorian England, that echo the works of H.G. Wells, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker (amongst others). Steampunk is often regarded as a sub-genre of SF*, but often contains elements of Crime, Horror and Fantasy, making it a quintessential example of The Fantastic*.

Sword and Sorcery Also known as Heroic Fantasy*, Sword and Sorcery is the type of Genre Fantasy* predominantly based around central characters who are swordsmen/women and magicians. It is the commonest form of Genre Fantasy and the term S&S could be happily used interchangeably with Genre Fantasy, given the fact that the majority of the books that are labelled Fantasy as S&S.

Supernatural Horror *See* **Dark Fantasy**

WFA World Fantasy Award (*see* Awards Listings p. 166)

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